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VOL. 1333.

PICTURES ACROSS THE CHANNEL

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

COLLECTION

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

PATTY 2 vols.
MIRIAM'S MARRIAGE 2 vols.

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KATHARINE S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF "PATTY," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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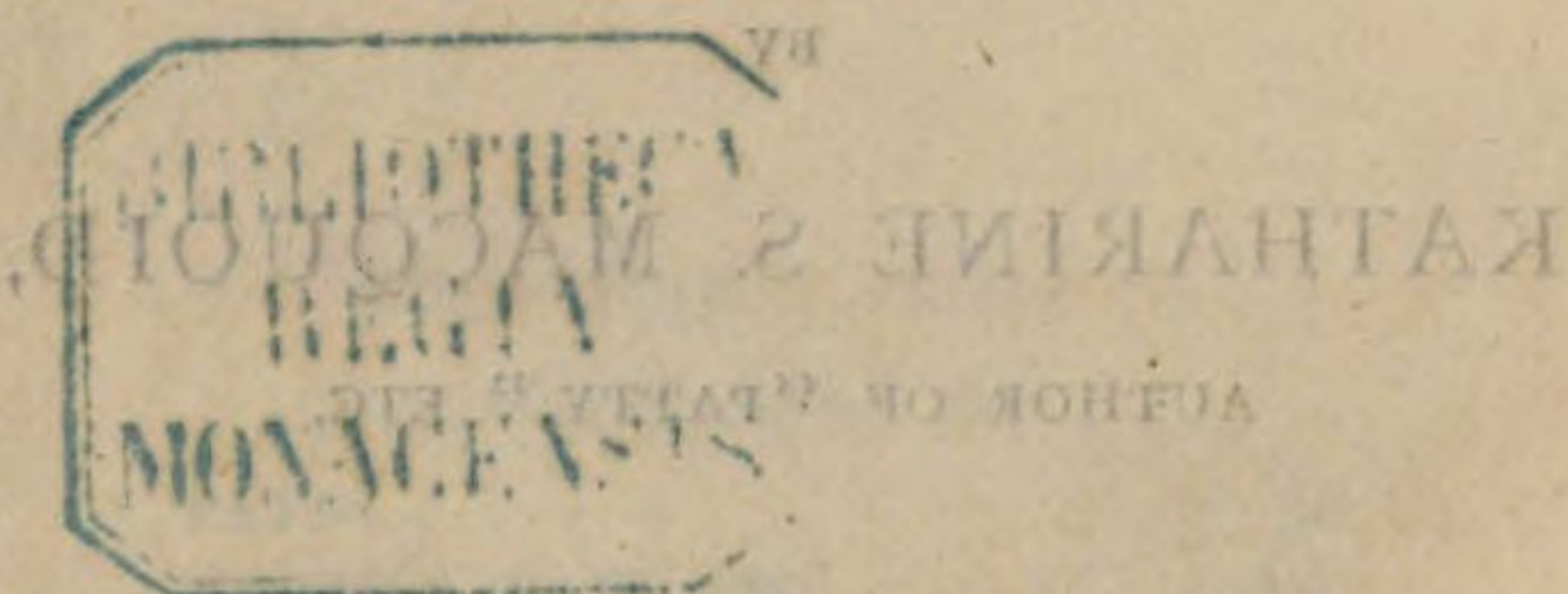
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PICTURES

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IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I

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THE FISHERMAN OF AUGE

PROLOGUE

THE FISHERMAN OF AUGE.

THE FISHERMAN OF AUGE.

THE FISHERMAN OF AUGUE.

PROLOGUE.

A FLAT sandy shore, stretching away on the left as you look seaward till it blends with that indefinite grey tint of sea and sky that bounds distant seascapes with the poetic indistinctness of the future—ending abruptly on the right in a narrow point, which, swelling as it retreats inland, gradually rises in a lofty green hill, and effectually shuts out from sight the coast beyond. At low tide you can make your way over the end of the point without so much as a wetting, and then the coast reveals itself in a succession of slightly curved bays, terminating in a chain of soft grey mud hills, for ever accumulating, and disappearing again by the action of the waves.

There is nothing to distinguish the first strip of coast-land on this side the point from the rest, ex-

cept its lonely aspect and the curious circuitous channel, almost in the shape of the figure eight—the channel by which a small river finds its way through some lesser grey hills to the sea. This river's stony bed is always dry in summer-time, but the strangely-shaped mouth generally holds back some supply from the retreating waves; and the belief among the villagers is that, before the turn of the tide, the water so retained becomes purified from its briny flavour.

Villagers is a too populous word for the inhabitants of Auge. The place consists of a dozen fishermen's cottages at most, scattered widely apart, some on the sands, some nestling under the shelter of the mud hills, a few built on the green hill-side, and almost smothered with an overgrowth of the seabuckthorn, yellow just now with its sticky berries.

But our chief interest is with one cottage in Auge, and that stands at the very mouth of the river, near to the little cove where all the boats lie snugly together on the sand-dike to the left of the figure of eight, which sand-dike has still so firm a hold over the invasions of the waves that it is al-

most covered with coarse grass and sea-holly; behind the cottage is a fair show of lettuce, soup-herbs, and potatoes growing in the sandy soil.

A tall, handsome young fisherman, in a blue jersey and scarlet cap, is standing in front of the cottage.

He is talking vehemently, but it is easy to see that he is not angry with the quiet woman seated on one of the benches beneath the little porch.

"There, my mother, I have told thee all," and the young fisherman throws himself on the ground and buries his head in Madame Lelièvre's lap, to hide his agitation.

His mother bends her face over him—such a gentle face! with the small straight nose, the timid regular mouth, and large soft brown eyes one sees among the women of St. Roque.

Her son has been talking of love, and there seems to be something in the word that makes her sigh deeply before she speaks.

"I have seen that thou hadst trouble in thy heart this long time, my child, and often I wished

to ask the cause,—but then I said to myself, ‘My Désiré loves his mother, and he is good; when he he sees fit he will come to her to get this thorn removed.’ But, alas! I cannot remove it, my son. Victorine Triquet is a good woman, and she loves me; but I cannot ask her to give thee her little Marie till thou hast a home to bring her to.”

“My mother!” Désiré started up, angry and excited, but her sweet resigned face checked an imprecation half uttered. “If my father will settle nothing, how can I make a home? He says neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no;’ he will not admit me to be partner in his gains, and when I ask to leave him and join Jacques Fayel, he makes no answer. Mother, mother! thou oughtest to help me now; but for thee I had quarrelled out and out long ago, and had a cabin of my own, for Jacques gains more than any of us.”

The colour sprang over his mother’s pale face. It was plain that some unusual emotion had mastered her patience, for she clasped her son’s arm closely with both hands, and her words came hurriedly, almost with vehemence,

“No, Désiré! never quarrel with thy father—never! I shall not grow old; and when I am gone there will be room for Marie. You will both want a woman to make your soup and wash and mend your clothes. Only I ask myself if Marie Triquet will do this, or if she will not want a richer husband than my Désiré.”

“Hush, mother! you say this too often; and as for Marie, she is not rich. You know when her father died his affairs took a long time to settle, and this has made La Veuve Triquet a much poorer woman than she expected to be. Unless Marie marries some one she must mind the shop all her life; and I should think it is a happier lot to sit in one’s own cottage mending the clothes of the man one loves, than to stand all day behind a counter selling cakes and tarts to imbeciles of children.”

Madame Lelièvre was not convinced,—but what loving mother ever had the best of an argument against her only son?—and she ended by promising to sound Madame Triquet, the next time she went to St. Roque, about Marie’s future, and, if possible, to hint at Désiré’s attachment.

Her son kissed her forehead with the mixture of tenderness and reverence he always showed her, and then strolled away over the sands in front of the cottage. They were deserted just now: all the inhabitants of the little fishing village, except a few of the old and infirm, had gone out some distance along the coast to a point where a Spanish vessel had been wrecked two days before. The young fisherman had stayed at home on purpose to open his heart to his mother. She never left Auge except for mass on high festivals and for market days, when he always accompanied her to St. Roque.

He turned and looked back at her now as she sat knitting a blue worsted stocking in front of the one-storied cottage; and as some of her wise and loving words recurred to him, he trembled to think what his home would be to him without his mother.

The cottage was only a two-roomed cabin, with a tiled roof covered with thatch, many-coloured with house-leek and other parasites nestling in its crevices; in summer-time green with vine leaves, which were already bursting from their brown wrappings, apparently in a hurry to greet the warm

sunshine in which the far-stretching sands and glittering sea lay basking.

Céline Lelièvre sat knitting till her son was out of sight—sheltered from the sun's blaze by a little wooden porch he had made for her years before. But his words still troubled her. She soon let her pins droop lower and lower, and finally laying them aside, she rested her face in the palm of one hand, holding her elbow steady with the other, while she pondered the best way of dealing with her quondam friend Victorine Triquet.

Years ago they had been schoolfellows; every day had they gone to school together and come home again with their arms lovingly twined round one another's necks; every day at lesson time had they sat on the same bench, learned the same task; and at each prize distribution La Veuve Triquet, or rather Victorine Coulard, had been followed by the loving eyes of her friend as she went up for her couronne and her books, while Céline felt but too thankful for her Victorine's triumph and her own escape from such publicity, only coming in herself for an "honourable mention" in the shape of an

“accessite.” But the friendship had chilled as the characters of the two girls developed. The fair-haired, blue-eyed, thoroughly Norman-faced Victorine, with her hearty greeting and ready sympathy, was cold-hearted and worldly, and she said Céline was throwing herself away when she learned that her friend was promised to Martin Lelièvre, the fisherman of Augé.

Other people, too, who knew a little about Martin—no one knew much—thought that such a charming girl as Céline was lost on the silent, cunning-looking, though handsome, fisherman. Victorine did not care about his temper or his principles, she only thought of his poverty and of the immense sacrifice Céline would make in giving up St. Roque for a village on the sea-shore. One thing was certain, she should not be so foolish—the richest claimant should be the preferred one; so it came to pass when portly, middle-aged M. Triquet, the well-to-do pastry-cook, asked her of her mother, she was quite ready to say “yes,” and to be married in a fortnight. She was a widow four years later, with one little girl; and Marie Triquet, a pretty likeness

of her mother, had been the adored of Désiré Lelièvre ever since he left school.

Although Auge was twelve miles distant from St. Roque, Madame Lelièvre, as has been said, always went in for fête days and for any extra marketing, and as she took Désiré with her, and generally contrived to see her old friend, the two children were frequent playmates, and shared each other's bonbons and secrets in true child's fashion.

But after Marie had made her First Communion—that epoch in the life of a French girl—though Madame Triquet would still embrace her dear friend tenderly in the street, and ask eagerly for the health of monsieur her husband, she would no longer invite the mother and son in to rest, and spend the time they had to spare with her before their return to Auge. And when at fifteen the little timid Marie suddenly developed into a very pretty, plump damsel, La Veuve discouraged any intimacy between the young people.

At the grand Easter fair, where she paraded Marie in great state, also her own superb cap of point de Bruxelles—La Veuve's mother had worn a

real Caennais cap, but her daughter would have disdained anything so pagan and countrified—they met Désiré Lelièvre; but at this fair Madame Triquet became stone-blind to the youth's respectful greeting; he just managed to present his fairing to Marie, but she was hurried away with her thanks unspoken.

A few chance words had been since then occasionally interchanged between the young people, and Marie had smiled so sweetly and blushed so timidly, that Désiré had felt happy again, convinced that as yet he had no rival in the field. All this he had confessed to his mother, but he ended by saying that she must not delay in asking Marie as a wife for him, or he felt sure he should lose her.

Madame Lelièvre was quiet and timid, but she was quick-witted, and seldom took long to find her way out of a difficulty. Now the longer she thought the more perplexed she grew.

"If it only had been Marie," she said, and she went on thinking. Presently, with the confusion of her ideas, came a strange sharp pain in her head,

which almost made her cry out in agony. She rose abruptly and turned into the cottage.

Désiré came in at the usual hour for his midday meal; the last piece of wood he had thrown in the open fireplace was smouldering—all but extinguished; there had been no attempt made to re-kindle a flame. He looked at the table; it was just as it had been when he left the cottage: the pot-au-feu stood on the cold part of the hearth.

What had happened? He hastened into the inner room; his mother lay on her bed, pale, but not insensible, although she took no notice of his entrance; her hands were catching at her dress, at the bed-coverings, as if for refuge from her sufferings; and, to his horror, Désiré found that she was speechless.

He went to summon aid, but there was no one left in Auge who could be sent to St. Roque for a doctor, and he felt he could not leave her alone. The pain soon became an agony too terrible to witness, and he could do nothing to relieve it. After a while it seemed suddenly to cease, she lay quite still, and Désiré thought she slept; but long

before his father's return in the evening he knew that his mother would never wake again.

His visions of love and Marie seemed for ever blotted out. He loved his mother with that filial passion only found in men; he would scarcely yield her up for the last rites to be performed, and when his friend Jacques Fayel came to look for him the day after the funeral, he found Désiré lying on the floor beside the bed where she had lain, in dumb, tearless despair.

Désiré roused from this state by degrees, but his father's apparent indifference stirred his discontented feelings towards him to active rebellion; it became impossible to him to lead the quiet uneventful life of that little fishing village without her who had made home so happy.

The Italian war was just then public talk. A section of the 75th regiment of the line was quartered in St. Roque, and one evening Désiré presented himself before the captain, Monsieur de Gragnac, to be enrolled.

The matter was soon settled, for broad-shouldered young fellows like Désiré were welcome, and as it

was war-time, he took service for two years only. Perhaps a longer period would not have suited Désiré; for though he missed his mother more and more, and shrank from the strange sneering callousness with which his father treated her loss, he had not forgotten Marie Triquet, and he still cherished hopes about her, much as he shrank from present happiness.

Four months before, on the ever memorable 1st of January, 1859, words had been spoken at the Tuileries which had made war a possible and prominent idea in the minds of all men.

The French army had been daily adding to its numbers; the opening of the campaign was now eagerly looked for; glory, honour, riches were prophesied to those who swelled the ranks; but to Désiré Lelièvre the stirring change of life and scene offered sufficient temptation as a refuge from the bitterness of his first great sorrow.

In a week's time the regiment was in Paris, and before long it was on its way to Italy.

CHAPTER I.

The Return Home.

IN less than two months Montebello, Magenta, Melegnano, Solferino, had all been fought. Europe was astounded by the news of an armistice; the Italian campaign was over; and on the 14th of August, the eve of the Fête de l'Empereur, the victorious troops re-entered Paris in triumph.

Désiré accompanied his regiment to the camp at Chalons, and thence to other quarters; but in the summer of the following year the bataillon to which he belonged was ordered to Normandy, and one bright day in July he found himself again in St. Roque.

He had asked for a few weeks' leave, and quitting the troops at the caserne on the outskirts of the town, he took his way through the well-known streets towards St. Pierre, the tapering spire of which greeted him already.

The streets were quieter than usual, for all the

population had betaken itself to the suburb of Vaucelles to see the entry of the troops.

The cool shadow cast by the tall grey stone houses refreshed Désiré after the march along the hot, dusty high road. How delicious to the eye was the fresh verdure of the vine leaves clinging to the quaintly-sculptured dormers, or framing an open window, its sill gay with scarlet flowers. Still more exquisite to the tired traveller were the vistas of luxuriant gardens, rich in flowering shrubs and trellised creeping plants, forming bowers of verdure, which suddenly and unexpectedly disclosed themselves through small iron gratings or low-browed stone doorways, in what might have seemed the busiest and most work-a-day part of the thoroughfare.

Every well-known object made the young soldier's heart beat; and as he approached the Place Saint-Pierre the exquisite proportions of the lofty spire rising in its midst became blurred by the mist that rose in his eyes when he remembered how often he and his mother had gazed up at it together, and decided that it must have been sent

from heaven just as it now appeared, for no human architect could have planned so wondrous a work; but Désiré had travelled since then, and had seen greater marvels than the beautiful flèche of St. Pierre.

He was roused from the past to the present. A comely well-dressed woman, with a pretty blushing girl beside her, both of them evidently returning from Vaucelles, were standing close to him, and before he could speak Madame Triquet had exclaimed:

“Ma foi, Désiré! and is it really you?”

In the excitement of the day and the sudden emotion called up by his resemblance to his dead mother, La Veuve Triquet forgot all prudence; she received him with open arms, and he embraced her affectionately on both cheeks.

Then he turned to look at the little figure that he felt rather than saw close beside her mother, and somehow it seemed necessary to take Marie's hand and kiss it. How lovely she had grown in his absence!—the rosebud had expanded.

Perhaps La Veuve was struck too with the change that time had made in Désiré; his face was closely shaven, except a pair of severe moustaches, almost matching in colour the rich bronze of his skin. He looked more thoughtful, and certainly far sterner, than La Veuve had thought possible; his eyes were brown, like his mother's, but their expression had changed; perhaps his uniform and his medals—for he had three of the decorations the French love so dearly—impressed her; the result was, that instead of dismissing him in her usual patronizing good-humoured manner, she was still listening with breathless interest to his account of the last great battle, Solferino, when they reached the Rue Notre Dame.

The flood of remembrance that had filled Désiré's eyes as he entered the Place St. Pierre had been dried up by the sunshine of Marie's presence. He had tried several times to get a peep at her face after the first greeting; but he felt that she was there on the other side of her mother. Ah! if that walk could have continued; and surely it must do so—it seemed to him that it could never

cease. His heart was drawn out of him; it was with Marie!

He had forgotten all else. He took no notice of many friendly greetings; he did not cast one backward look at his favourite spire, framed by the carved woodwork of the projecting gables on either side, which seemed to keep up an everlasting nodding to each other, possibly of congratulation at being spared, in their half-timbered age and quaintness, amid the universal creation of new, unpicturesque stone buildings. Nor did Désiré so much as glance onward at the two landmarks of the town—the famous spires of St. Etienne—which filled the farther end of the street. Soldier though he was, he had still enough of sentiment to have fancied a welcome in every well-known object; but all sense was mastered by passion, and the ardent longing to discover whether it was in any degree returned.

“And for how long are you settled here, my friend?” said La Veuve, as they neared the shop windows full of tempting pastry, above which “La

Veuve Triquet," in large golden raised letters, told that she had reached her home.

"For three or four months, and I have a leave of some weeks. But, Madame Triquet, now that war is over, I am tempted to leave the army, and settle here for good. I don't like an idle life; and to be a soldier in garrison—*ma foi!* it is as dull as ditch-water."

"Well, well, well; you will talk to your father." La Veuve's volubility increased, for she suddenly remarked the direction Désiré's eyes had taken—as they now stood still the young people were face to face—and a side glance showed her Marie's crimson blushes. "And, my friend, I say to you *à tantôt*; I am forgetting your father's anxiety in my selfish pleasure at seeing you. Hasten to him at once. There! I will not listen while you say another word." She pushed Marie into the shop, and then stood in the doorway herself; and, although she wore no crinoline, almost filled the space as she planted a hand on each broad hip. "Run to Auge, like a good boy, and don't keep your father waiting.

Remember, you are all he has left, ce pauvre homme."

The words touched Désiré. Marie's image was succeeded rapidly by the last conscious look on his dying mother's face—a look that had haunted him often. Now, on the sudden impulse, he turned away, after a hastily-taken farewell, and full of the strong resolve of youth, wearied of the distance that still lay between him and his last remaining parent.

Ah, children! ah, friends! how perfect are all our future "castles!" How ruined and incomplete those we have tried to build! Will no warnings teach us? Will nothing but repeated failure satisfy us that it is only in romances that sudden conversions are effected, that dispositions, which have been hardening against each other for years like blocks of granite, will not in a day mingle like the sands of the sea? Only our own experience can teach us the bitter truth, that impulse and will are not all that we require; there must be patience and perseverance to aid the work. As the silkworm has surrounded itself, by little and little, with its warm

nest, so must we unwind the thread of habit patiently and slowly, if we would not lose the clue to its entire unravelment. But Désiré was young, ardent, and ignorant, he only thought that he would and could be for the future such a model son as the world had never seen, and that his father would love him dearly.

Martin embraced him on his first arrival, and then pushed him back and looked in his face. He clasped his hands over his eyes and turned away, shuddering. Désiré guessed that the likeness which he knew still existed between himself and his mother was the cause of this, and he tried to soothe his father by affectionate words, and an assurance that now he had come he hoped to make him less desolate. But Martin started up, looked wildly about him, as if seeking for some one, and then, bursting into a hard sneering laugh, left the cottage.

There had never been any confidence between Désiré and his father. His mother's frequent secret unhappiness, and the cold indifference with which her husband treated her, had roused a determined

spirit of opposition in the boy, sometimes shown in open acts of rebellion. Martin had rarely tyrannized over him—he had been cold and indifferent. Now he seemed quite changed. When they met again in the evening, he looked at his son with distrust, and was evidently greatly disturbed when the young soldier announced the length of his leave.

Désiré thought his father much aged: his lithe active figure was bent, the wrinkles on his face had deepened, and he was thin to emaciation. His son remembered that Martin had often been accused of miserly ways by his fellow-fishermen, and he began to see that his solitary life had increased these habits, and that he probably shrank from the burden of an inmate for so long a period.

But next day brought no softening in his father's manner,—rather increased hardness in the sneering comments he pronounced on all Désiré related; and the young man began to feel that Martin had taken his wife's death more to heart than any one had supposed possible, and that the

loss of her influence had made his own filial task a hard one.

On the third day his father remained at home, and Désiré seized the opportunity of speaking openly to him of Marie, and of his hopes and wishes. Martin listened in profound silence, and then he shook his head. "And I tell thee no, my boy. Thou art like the little birds which peep over the edge of the nest, and then think they have seen the world. If thou beginnest life with a bag of debts tied round thy neck, the bag will grow weightier and weightier, till either it will strangle and make an end of thee, or thou mayst be tempted to fling it away altogether."

"When my father is the creditor? foi de ma vie! Dost thou then think that military honour is all we soldiers learn to care for?"

Désiré knit his bushy eyebrows together, but the look he gave his father was more sorrowful than angry.

"Honour!" Martin Lelièvre's smile had a mocking quality in it, which made his smooth, brown, wrinkled face, with its lipless mouth and small, grey, watery

eyes, realize one's ideal of "Redcap Sly." "Honour is very well, my son, under a glass case. The rich never take the case off. As to us poor, dame! hunger and thirst and every want of nature crush the glass early for us; but debt, *mon ami*, it must be strong glass indeed which resists that pressure!"

Désiré turned away. He longed, too, to preserve peace in his home,—the home he had not seen for more than a year, and which had seemed to him on his first arrival a paradise, full of fresh memories of childhood,—of his mother, whose death had driven him from it. He came out of the cottage. There was no use in self-deceit. His father was in earnest; his marriage with Marie was hopeless for the present; and, what pressed heavier still, the truth he had so long suspected without knowing what he feared had been uttered. His father had no belief in honour or honesty—not even in his. The terrible doubt that followed stupefied him—was Martin himself honest? But he thrust it away. He might find himself unable to continue to love his father, but he would try to respect him. But now he must act. He had asked Martin to admit him

as partner in his fishery, to demand Marie Triquet in marriage, and to lend him the sum of three hundred and seventy-five francs necessary to pay his discharge for the remaining nine months of his military service; and the old man, as we have seen, had refused decidedly to be a party to any scheme which would begin his son's new life with debt, although he had confessed to Désiré that his inheritance would some day be larger than he expected.

There was energy beneath young Lelièvre's ardour — energy that not only raised his drooping hopes, but kept them sustained. In some ways it was a relief not to be associated with his father. Two days had taught him the difference between intentions and actions—nothing less than a miracle could make life easy when passed with such a man as Martin Lelièvre. It seemed to Désiré, as he walked slowly up and down on the sands, that, although his father had been always hard, and sneering, and impracticable, he had never spoken the reckless words or avowed the lawless opinions that escaped him now unchecked.

The fishermen came in with their nets, the girls and women with their spades and knives, and full baskets. Désiré seemed to be searching the sands for some undiscoverable object, so slowly did he walk along, his head bent down, his hands clasped behind him, while his eyes never left the ground.

Suddenly he stood still, and then hastily retraced his steps to the cottage.

Martin was stooping over the open fireplace, skimming the pot-au-feu. His supple figure looked still slighter in his fisherman's garb of dark blue, the knitted jersey fitted him closely, and the sleeves, rolled back to the elbow, showed the knotted intricacies of his muscular arms; the firelight gleamed on his dark, regular features, compressed mouth, and smoothly-wrinkled skin; his scarlet night-cap was pulled down nearly to his restless grey eyes, which seemed to be always seeking something never found.

He started quickly as his son's step sounded on the cottage floor.

"Eh bien! Where art thou going now?"

Martin spoke in a surprised tone, for Désiré

went straight to the armoire, — which, with three chairs, a bench, and a round table, made all the furniture,—took out his uniform, and began rapidly to exchange his working clothes for it.

“I am going to St. Roque, my father.”

“To St. Roque! And for what? Thou art not such a fool, Désiré, as to thrust thy head into the jaws of that she-wolf, La Triquet, that she may crunch thee at her pleasure. No; thou art my son! Thou couldst not be such a dunce as to make thy own proposal. But listen.” He raised both hands, and then with a quick gesture extended them towards his son. “I am not so indifferent as thou mayst think, Désiré mio, aha! hai capito. I have not been in thine Italy, yet thou seest I know something. There is no room here for another fisherman. I tell thee, besides, Marie Triquet is too friande for a fish-wife, and besides, I like to be alone. Find employment somewhere else. Then we will see. I promise nothing, however; absolutely nothing.”

An eager hope sprang into his son's eyes at the beginning of his speech, but at the closing words it

faded away into the same dull sad expression that had filled them while he paced up and down the sands.

He just nodded, muttered "à tantôt," and then, stepping over the threshold, as soon as he had settled his cap firmly on his head he strode rapidly towards St. Roque.

At the great Calvary nearest the city he saw a young girl kneeling, but he scarcely noticed her as he hurried on.

The girl was rising from her knees as he passed; she stood looking after him.

She was not pretty, rather above middle height, and slenderly made. It was easy to see by her costume that she belonged to a fishing village, though she wore one of the invariable close-fitting caps with cockscomb frill of lace atop that characterize the women of St. Roque now-a-days.

She was not pretty. She had nothing in the way of complexion or features to attract notice; but there was a stamp of candour and intelligence on her face, and a soft light in her dark grey eyes, as she looked after Désiré Lelièvre.

She turned again to the Calvary, and offered up a prayer for her old playmate, and then came down the steps and set out briskly on the way to Augé. This was Mimi or Emilie Fayel, the sister of Désiré's friend Jacques. Désiré had been the hero of his own village, but he had had in his boyhood no eyes or words for any girl except Marie Triquet.

CHAPTER II.

The Counsel of Captain de Gragnac.

MONSIEUR DE GRAGNAC, the captain of Désiré's company, was sitting smoking in his lodging when there came a rapping at the door.

He said "Entrez" not quite as cheerfully as usual, for on the table before him lay an uncut yellow volume, just sent by the author, and he was longing to read it with the mixture of interest, curiosity, and unbelief with which we generally peruse the books of our dear friends and relatives; but his cheerful look came back when he saw who his visitor was. He nodded a smiling "bon jour" to Désiré Lelièvre's military salute.

"Well, Lelièvre, what is it? I thought you had got a month's leave?"

"Yes, yes, monsieur." Désiré said these words quickly enough, but there he stopped.

"You have got into some scrape, then, and you

think that I can help you. Very well, mon ami, tell me at once what it is."

"Pardon, Monsieur le Capitaine, it is a scrape, and it is not. Ma foi! it is—that—that I want to get my discharge."

"Comment! your discharge!" The Captain sat bolt upright; he had till now leaned back in his chair, smoking his cigar as leisurely as before Désiré entered. "Why, you have scarcely seen more than a year's service!"

"It is true, Monsieur le Capitaine; but the war is over, and I cannot lead an idle life, and—and—I have another reason besides."

And then, little by little, the Captain drew from Désiré the story of his love for Marie, which he told, too, like a man, without any sheepish false shame. He said that since he had seen Marie again he felt quite sure that his head would always be filled with her, and that he should never do any good at anything till he was married. And when this was all said, Désiré drew a long breath, like one who has laid down a burden, and feels all the better for it.

The Captain leaned back in his chair. He had taken the cigar from his lips, and held it between the fingers of one hand while he twisted and re-twisted his moustaches with the other. Captain de Gragnac was a brave and distinguished soldier, and he was not particularly selfish, but to him evidently the infatuation of such a love as Désiré's was an enigma.

"What a horrible waste of life," he thought, "for this fine handsome young fellow, with a world full of women before him, at one-and-twenty to give up all freedom and tie himself to a pretty-faced doll—for what else can she be at seventeen?—and a life of hard labour to support perhaps a large family!"

"Well," he said at last, for Désiré moved restlessly, as if impatient for his answer, "I've no doubt you think you are right, mon brave, but there seem to me two or three points still to be considered. You say you feel sure, if you can find yourself an employment, your father will find the three hundred and seventy-five francs to pay off your coming time of service. Bon! But now, first, employment

which will keep a wife and children is not found directly one looks for it, as you find crabs in the rocks, Lelièvre; and next, is your father also willing to furnish the necessary funds for your mobilier?—for your savings out of a year's service can't be much—we all know how little profit there was in our Italian campaign. And, also, I think there are more idle employments than that of a soldier in garrison.”

Lelièvre smiled. He felt secretly disappointed; he had always looked on his captain as all-powerful, knowing him to be—what is rare among French officers of the line—both well-born and influential, and it is wonderful, considering all things, how deeply the reverence for gentle blood is rooted in the hearts of French provincials.

“I am not afraid for the mobilier, monsieur; besides, it does not cost much,—a bed, an armoire, a table, some chairs, some articles for cooking, and that is all. I have some of these things which belonged to my mother before she married; they are mine now”—he looked very sad as he said this—

"and for the rest, I think Madame Triquet would help if my father would not."

"Bon!" The Captain was still contemplating Désiré as if he were an animal of a new species. Marriage was to Monsieur de Gragnac an institution — nothing more; an admirable institution, when, at forty-five or fifty years of age, life begins to be as fatiguing as heretofore it has been charming; it is well then to take a wife—or rather to allow one's mother or aunt to take a wife for one, to look after one's income and one's ménage—an agreeable, douce compagne, who will make the evening of one's days pass pleasantly; but to mix up love and its hopes and fears and passionate joys and griefs with such an institution was, Captain de Gragnac had hitherto thought, only a state of mind to be met with in novels; so unreal, so improbable, such a falsehood against the existing state of society, as perfectly to justify mothers in keeping such pernicious amusements as novels from the reading of their young daughters. He thought over all his acquaintances. Never once had he heard of such a folly as a marriage the origin of which

had been mutual affection. And how could it be? If he married, he should get his mother to ask some young lady of her parents, he should have a peep at her first at the opera, or if that were not practicable, he should content himself with her photograph, then he should be presented to her as her future husband, and he should see her at most three or four times, in her mother's presence; she would call him monsieur and he would call her mademoiselle till they married.

He took his cigar out of his mouth again when he came to the end of these reflections, and looked up at Désiré. It might be that this sort of thing was usual among the people. Certainly, he had never had "a confidence of the heart" from one of his soldiers before. Love, as a stepping-stone to marriage, might—who could say?—be as common among badly-born people as the custom of wearing blouses among the peasantry. But then again it might only be an infatuation of this young soldier's. Clearly it was his duty to caution him.

"Is this the first love affair you've had, Lelièvre?"

Désiré reddened. There was something very

practical and unsympathizing in the way the Captain said "love affair."

"Ma foi! monsieur"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I don't mean to say Marie's the only girl I ever fancied, but she's the only one I ever wished to make my wife."

"And is it, do you think, wise—when you confess that your head is so full of her as to interfere with your duties—to make her your wife?"

"Comment, Monsieur le Capitaine!" Désiré looked flushed and astonished.

"Understand me, mon ami, these fierce flames confuse the brain with their smoke while they last, and die out quickly. Take my word for it, Le-lièvre, when you have been married to your wife two months you may feel friendship for her, but no longer love. Now, a great many more qualities are wanting to fulfil the requirements of a sentiment than of a passion." The Captain smiled here, and raised his eyebrows at himself for indulging in talk so far above the comprehension of his hearer. "What I mean is," he said quickly, "are you not too much in love now to judge whether Marie is likely to suit you as a wife?"

And now again Captain de Gragnac smiled at himself. According to this doctrine, an intimate acquaintance with your future wife before marriage was necessary for your happiness. No, it could not be for well-bred folks, or it would be "de règle;" but for "the people," who must necessarily live afterwards in much closer companionship, it doubtless was so.

"But, monsieur, it is the love I have so long felt for her, and which the sight of her has—has—has—well, monsieur, I can't tell you how I love her now. That makes me sure she is the girl I ought to marry."

The Captain felt there was no use in prolonging the argument. He and Désiré were only talking in an unknown tongue each to the other.

"Have you thought of any employment?" he said.

"Well, monsieur, that is what I came to you for. I should like out-door work best, if I could get it; but, you know, the farmers give such small pay hereabouts, that it's only the women that will take it."

"If you had served longer, you might have had a chance of being made garde-champêtre; but you see, my friend, that is only given to old soldiers. It is their perquisite, in fact. Really, I don't know how to help you."

And again he put his cigar in his mouth, and puffed away vigorously.

"If I could get a post as gardener," said Désiré, "to some gentleman, monsieur's recommendation would help me greatly."

The Captain smiled. "But what do you know about gardening? Gardening is a business which must be learned."

"Ma foi! monsieur. I am determined to earn a living, and I would soon learn what was necessary."

"Well, then, be patient for two days," said Monsieur de Gragnac. "I am going to Le Callac, and I may possibly hear of something to suit you; and, meantime, you can think of all I have said to you."

Désiré poured forth his thanks with the effusion only a Frenchman is capable of, the tears glistening

in his eyes while he did so, and then he made his military salute and departed.

Young as he was, he had a remarkable power of influencing those to whom he spoke. His handsome, intelligent face may have had something to do with this, but his manner was so simple and truthful, so entirely free from self-conceit, while it conveyed the impression of earnest self-dependence, that hitherto, although he might not have so many acquaintances as some of his comrades, he had never lost a friend.

Monsieur de Gagnac felt a warm interest in his fortunes, although he still thought Désiré was throwing himself away. By good chance his friend the lord of the domain at Le Callac was in want of a garde. He said he would prefer a soldier—so great a moralatrice was the French army then esteemed—and he would take any soldier out of Captain de Gagnac's company without other recommendation but that of having served under him. As the country round was wild and uninhabited, he should prefer an active young man to an older one.

and Captain de Gragnac sent for his protégé as soon as he returned to St. Roque, and Désiré seemed scarcely able to believe in his good fortune. He stood still looking at the Captain, unable to bring out a word of thanks.

"The worst of it is," said Monsieur de Gragnac, smiling, for he quite understood the young man's emotion, "that I fear this will serve to increase your marriage madness. The pay of a private garde is, as you probably know, just double that of a public one."

CHAPTER III.

Désiré's Courtship.

To Désiré's great surprise, when he told his father of his good fortune, Martin Lelièvre looked pleased, and said, cheerfully, that he supposed the next move would be to ask the pretty Marie of Madame Triquet.

His son had expected opposition, sulkiness, a final coming round, perhaps, after much perseverance on his own part. This sudden yielding filled him with joy.

He embraced his father heartily, but Martin repulsed him; told him to keep his demonstrations for Marie, and then deliberately dressed himself in all his best clothes, and started off to await at the cross road the diligence which conveyed travellers to St. Roque.

He peremptorily refused to let Désiré go with him.

"Old heads waggle together best alone," he said;

“young ones are always de trop when there is business to be done; besides—who knows—la mère Triquet may have promised her daughter elsewhere, and may tell me I’m seeking feathers from a plucked chicken.”

He said the last words not as if he believed in such a possibility, but because he could not resist the opportunity of sneering at his son’s hopes; and once again Désiré stood still, bewildered at the change that had come over his father.

Had grief for his wife’s death struck so deep as to change his sulky, sullen nature to the reckless, wild mocking fits that at times possessed him now, or was his mind giving way? Only this last surmise could account for the terrified glances he at times darted round the rooms, and the ghastly paleness that followed.

The day seemed long to Désiré. He knew his father could not return before evening. He wandered up and down the sands till the tide drove him away, and then he climbed to the heights beyond them, with a vague hope—although he knew it was far too soon—of seeing a cart in the

distance, for his father had said he should trust to some chance mode of coming home.

Désiré tried to recollect every look and word of Marie's since his return,—he had managed to see her several times after his first interview with Captain de Gragnac; and each time—so it seemed to him—she had been more willing to listen while he spoke, and had looked up in his face more and more sweetly when he wished her and her mother good-bye.

It must—it should come right! and yet, although he could not find the slightest shadow of foundation for it, a film of doubt and mistrust came between his mental sight and the bright pictures of the future his fancy drew.

At last the long day came to an end—the grey and orange tints of the cliffs changed to burnished gold as the setting sunlight flashed over them; and as Désiré looked once more towards the high road, winding its up-and-down course into the interior, he saw something moving on it.

The soft, moss-like earth yielded as he sprang again into the path below, and hurried towards the road.

It was the fisherman.

“Well, well,” he said mockingly, “I have not had my journey for nothing.”

Désiré poured out his thanks—he could scarcely believe in his happiness; but he did not this time attempt to embrace his father. “Eh bien—what has happened? Tell me everything, my father.”

“Bah! thou art like a woman, Désiré—they must always have words. Men should be content with facts. What wilt thou? La Veuve is willing to take thee for a son-in-law as soon as thou hast got thy discharge.”

Désiré’s eyes spoke the eager question that came.

“Tais-toi!”—Martin put up his hand to check the young man’s words—“the money will be paid at once; and if thou art bent on running thy head into a halter—a halter, mind, that can never be unfastened—why, thou mayest see Marie to-morrow, after thou hast arranged the matter with thy captain. He will tell thee how to manage the affair; for me, I have done enough.”

His look and manner were bitterly unkind, and he turned away with unfriendly haste, as if to check

the expression of his son's gratitude. It seemed to Désiré that the fisherman was acting a part to conceal his real feelings. The next minute the young man blamed himself for such a suspicion; something had happened in St. Roque to annoy his father, or—who could tell?—the prospect of his son's marriage might have recalled his own, and its sad ending; and such a rugged, determined nature as Martin Lelièvre's was not a likely one to betray his sorrow even to his only child.

But Désiré was too happy to think much about anybody beside Marie. Happy is scarcely the word—it was a fevered rapture, under which he took no heed of time or anything that passed around him.

It was even more unreal, more dream-like, next day, in La Veuve's back-parlour, as he sat close beside Marie, holding one of her dear little soft hands in his, and looking into her face. It is true her mother sat opposite—had sat opposite even when he had pressed his first kiss on Marie's blushing forehead. Her presence was neither necessary nor satisfactory; but then these were early days, and the young girl's extreme timidity had made

Désiré, ardent lover as he was, feel bashful in taking that first kiss.

It was very delicious to sit there looking at the pretty modest girl whose blue eyes had not once fully met his, and feeling that she would soon be all his own. Only he wished a customer would come into the shop. He did not want to listen to La Veuve's incessant talk; he wanted to say many little words to Marie, which would be most uninteresting to her sharp-eared mother; also he wanted to see how those blue eyes looked with the lashes lifted, and whether he could not make the rosy lips dimple into a smile. Above all, he wanted to hear Marie say she loved him, and there was no hearing anything with Madame Triquet in presence.

There came a quick tread of little feet in the shop; his heart throbbed with pleasant anticipations. La Veuve must surely attend to her customers! But Désiré's hopes were not to be fulfilled so speedily.

"Marie, thou art wanted; make haste, mon chou! thou must never let anything domestic interfere with business, must she, mon garçon?" She looked

at Désiré as if she were sure of his approval, and quite unconscious of the rueful gaze with which his eyes followed Marie into the shop. She talked glibly for a few minutes, and then getting no answer, she looked up with a sharp twinkle in her eyes.

“You are hurried, my friend; and it is a pity, too, for a fine youth to waste his day in chattering to an old woman over her tricot. Yes, yes; I know you are polite, but I cannot suffer it. This is Marie’s business time. She may be obliged to remain in the shop for an hour—what do I know? for two—for three hours!”

“But I am in no hurry,” persisted Désiré.

“Ah! you are so kind; but this which I tell you is better, is it not? You will come next Sunday, and you will accompany the little Marie to St. Pierre for Le Salut; and after you can take her, if you will, for a promenade in the Cours Caffarelli. Ma foi! I tell you that it is delicious there in the cool of the evening.”

Here was a charming prospect. With the certainty of having Marie to himself for several hours

he grew reconciled to the present parting, and he bade adieu to Madame Triquet more easily than she expected.

“Au revoir, mon ami! My remembrance to your good father.” She held out her dimpled hand to him; then, as if prompted by an after-thought, she called after him—

“Don’t stop tattling in the shop; you know that it might compromise Marie.”

She winked and smiled good-humouredly, but Désiré passed on without answering.

He found the shop empty of customers.

Marie was sitting behind one of the counters, bending over her embroidery frame.

Désiré bent over it too; but before he could whisper a word a warning tap sounded on the glass-door of the parlour, and made them both start.

Désiré reddened. This sort of espionage was hateful. However, he thought of Sunday, and decided that it was, on the whole, wiser not to provoke Madame Triquet by resistance, on the first day of his courtship.

When he reached the pastry-cook’s next Sunday

he was grievously disappointed to find that La Veuve not only meant to accompany her daughter, but that she proposed to walk between him and Marie.

"It is charming, you know, to feel that one has a child on each arm," she said to Désiré.

He found the service, short as it was, very wearisome. It is over at last; the Benediction is said; the chairs squeak and scrape over the floor as every one hastens outside into the cooler air. He is beside Marie again as she mounts the steps and dips her fingers into the holy water stoup.

They pass out of church through the great sculptured western doorway, and an acquaintance fastens herself on Madame Triquet. This is Désiré's opportunity, and he offers his arm to Marie; but she shakes her head, and glances at her mother. She looks at Désiré, however, but there is no response in her eyes to the love which fills his own.

"Marie," he whispers, tenderly, "do you remember fair-time, before I went away?"

Marie smiles sweetly, and says "yes" in a pleasant voice; and yet Désiré is not satisfied; he expected a blush and drooping eyelids for answer,

and somehow he would have preferred this reply to any word at all, for that fairing had been his first effort at making Marie understand his devotion—a pink, heart-shaped sucre de pomme, transfixed by a thick golden arrow, with a fan inside. Madame Triquet's acquaintance walks on with her, and Marie and Désiré are side by side.

Madame le Petit is full of news. Her husband has been to Paris to learn the fashions, and she has marvels to describe in the way of coiffure and costume. And, besides, Monsieur le Petit has brought back some choice canards and tit-bits of scandal—fresh and astounding to the female Norman mind—the bourgeoisie of St. Roque not being addicted to the reading of newspapers, and being, moreover, inhabitants of one of the purest and simplest cities of France.

Madame Triquet is desperately anxious to listen to these stories, and yet more desirous that they shall not reach Marie's ears, and little by little she turns away from her daughter and Désiré, till her head almost touches that of Madame le Petit.

It is dusk when they reach the Cours Caffarelli,

almost gloomily dark on beyond, where the lights from the town and the quays can no longer penetrate the shadow beneath the solemn lines of poplar trees that border the Orne.

There are birds singing still among the trees on the other side of the river, and when the young people turn homewards again, the scene before them has an almost unreal beauty as the lights reflect themselves in the dark silent water, and glow like a file of glowworms along the basin of the harbour.

Désiré talks softly to Marie, she questions him about Italy; and, though he would rather have spoken of his love, he answers all she asks, and grows animated, out of the soft languor that tied his tongue while they walked under the trees in the Cours.

They have reached the Place Royale, and still Madame le Petit's tongue wags and Madame Triquet listens.

The Place is crowded with townspeople promenading up and down.

There are only a few gas lamps here, and it is

just that sort of confused, indistinct crowd one likes to find oneself in with one's beloved. One feels sure that every look and word is only marked by her.

Désiré does not again ask Marie to take his arm. He takes her hand and draws it gently to his heart, prisoning it so tightly that she cannot withdraw it.

Does Marie feel the fierce bounds with which its presence is greeted? If she does she is not displeased thereat, for she only smiles sweetly up at Désiré the next time he speaks.

That tête-à-tête is like an intoxicating dream. Both he and Marie start and flush as Madame, having said "bon soir" to her gossip, suddenly bethinks herself of her daughter, and turns her head.

"Ma foi, Marie, thou shouldst not quit my arm! and you, Désiré, will give me yours."

It is all over, and when will it come again?

It is very dark as they turn out of the Place into the narrower streets where the lamps are scarcer. There is a diligence ready to start as they pass; but Désiré chooses to walk to Auger.

"It will not take me three hours," he says, as they part at Madame Triquet's door; and then he whispers to Marie that he shall think of her all the way. He can say no more, for La Veuve declares that they are very late.

CHAPTER IV.

Les Régates.

DÉSIRÉ'S courtship went on smoothly enough to outward eyes. Marie continued to smile sweetly on him, and Madame Triquet generally walked home from church on Sundays with her gossip, the wife of the coiffeur. She would also occasionally take Marie's place in the shop, and give the lovers a five minutes' talk. And yet Désiré was not as happy as he expected,—perhaps no one ever is; but although he loved Marie more passionately than ever, he could not feel satisfied that she loved him.

She was no longer timid with him, but her manner was quite as cold, quite as unresponsive as on the day when he had placed his ring on her finger; more so, for then she had blushed and trembled. Now her sweet calmness was almost irritating.

However, in one month more she would be his

wife, and then all would be right. The Fête de l'Empereur was close at hand, and he was to accompany Marie and her mother to see the regatta: the second morning after the fête he was to start for Le Callac, and to take possession of his new post.

Although this journey would separate him from Marie, he looked forward to it as a means of shortening the time before him. His new duties, a new way of life, would help to distract his thoughts and make him less anxious, for much of Désiré's light-heartedness had vanished with his betrothal. This might be partly caused by Madame Triquet's constant and domineering interference; lately, whatever Désiré did or said was sure to be wrong with her. The young man did not choose to quarrel with Marie's mother, but he had naturally a fiery spirit, and on each occasion he felt it more difficult to restrain himself. A temporary absence from this danger would be a great relief.

He had obtained permission to take service with the Captain's friend; but he would not be able to get his entire discharge from the army till the even-

ing before his marriage, so that on the morning of the festival he went into St. Roque in full regimentals, and took his place for the last time among his comrades in the grand semi-ecclesiastical, semi-military service in the Church of St. Etienne.

Désiré's eyes were more taken up in finding out Marie and her mother among the dense crowd of women which filled the lower end of the nave and aisles than in gazing at the splendid assemblage of richly-robed priests, and the decorated and embroidered military and civic dignitaries grouped round and about the high altar.

Monsieur de Gragnac, who was pacing up and down the nave with another officer, their drawn swords gleaming on their shoulders, suddenly gave the word to the soldiers who lined either side—
"Portez genoux!"

Désiré started awake. He had forgotten everything but Marie, and the swelling organ had helped to dull him to outward things; but now the crashing of the trumpets and the reverberating thunder of the drums as the band struck up a furious military march, effectually dispelled all dreaming. An-

other burst from the two immense organs, almost drowning the priests' voices; again the word of command and the clash of arms; then the drums and trumpets bellowing as if they tried to shake the lofty stone groining overhead; the Benediction,—and the ceremony was over.

All who had formed a part of the pageant fell into a procession, which only halted when it reached the Préfecture. Désiré sought eagerly for Marie in the lane of gazing faces on either side the street as he marched along with his companions. In vain! It was a real relief when at length he was at liberty to go and find her.

La Veuve met him at her shop-door.

“Eh, bien; eh, bien, Monsieur Désiré; this is pretty conduct for a lover! We shall all be too late for the boat-race; the best seats will all be taken! If I had dreamed you meant to keep us waiting in this way we would have started alone.”

“Where's Marie?” he said, roughly; for his previous anxiety at not seeing her anywhere had not improved his stock of patience.

“Ah, voilà, that is it! Where should she be, but

crying, poor little angel, in the parlour, for fear she should miss the show?"

Désiré knew in his own mind that Marie was crying because he did not come; but, instead of saying so, he pushed his way into the back room, and found the little maiden arranging her cap-strings before the looking-glass.

She was very pretty in her fête dress. Her soft white tulle cap, with its wreath of white satin bows over the forehead, suited her fair complexion admirably, and her plump little figure looked charming in her new gown of sprigged cambric.

Désiré had caught her in his arms and kissed her before La Veuve followed him; but her voice was now heard urging speed, and Marie seemed quite anxious to escape from her lover, that she might arrange her striped shawl to the best advantage before the glass.

As they went along the crowded streets he managed to whisper to her that, when she was really his wife, he would not be set aside for a shawl.

"But, Désiré, I must always be well arranged,

must I not?" and Marie pouted a little for the first time since her engagement.

Every one was hurrying along from all parts of the town towards the Basin of the harbour, so that it would have been very difficult to take any but the direct route. The haste and excitement of the rest increased Madame Triquet's irritation.

"We shall be late! ah, how late we shall be! Ah, ciel! what a thing it is to have to do with a man without any spirit of management! Ah, if only my poor Triquet had been alive! We would then have had places secured beforehand. No need to hurry and heat ourselves in this ridiculous manner. We are disgraced before the world!"

But Désiré only shrugged his shoulders. He had a vivid remembrance that in former times Monsieur Triquet came in for even worse scoldings than this, and that he himself had often felt thankful he had his own gentle mother instead of little Marie's.

When they reached the Basin, lined along each of its broad stone quays with rows of chairs and benches, there was not a front seat to be had.

La Veuve darted a scorching glance on Désiré; but there was no help for it. He told her she had best be quick, or she would have no chance even of the second row, which was filling fast. As soon as he had placed them, La Veuve imperiously bade him come on the other side of her; but he told her he was not tired, and preferred standing behind Marie's chair.

He was vexed—there were tears in Marie's eyes. He did not think she would have cared so much about a front place. Poor little dear! he wished he had not been late.

He bought her a galette from one of the numerous hawkers, quite forgetting that she would naturally despise street pastry. She thanked him; but she was not hungry; she only wanted to see the races. She seemed unnatural, excited, restless,—not a bit like his own quiet little love. Ah, Désiré! you are not the first man who has discovered that a fête-day is apt to be a sure touchstone of a woman's temper.

He was too much vexed to follow the wisest course in such a position—to forget self altogether,

and enter into the universal gaiety, of which the soldiers, scattered plentifully among the smiling, brightly-dressed spectators, were great promoters. Some of the grander folk were seated under a tent at one end of the Basin; but all the jokes and laughter came from the merry-faced wearers of caps and blouses. Such caps! of every variety—from the shopkeepers in point de Bruxelles, and their daughters in tulle and flowers, to the humble maid-servants in the pretty caps made of embroidered cambric and Valenciennes lace—for a French girl must be poor indeed if she does not possess one expensive cap. There was an abundance of the real Caennais head-covering—a close-fitting skull cap of net or muslin, with something very like a white cock's-comb standing up across the forehead—but here and there on the head of some well-to-do farmer's wife, who had come in for the occasion, dressed in her rich brown figured satin gown, with her embroidered crimson velvet neckerchief, tucked down in front under the square bib of her black silk apron, rose the ponderous white structure now rarely seen except at Vire, and

occasionally at Bayeux. The wearers of these caps had all shining golden earrings, and crosses or medals hanging from their necks.

It was a very orderly crowd; full of mirth, but also of courtesy; each one being addressed as *Madame* or *Monsieur*, and much bowing and raising of hats being interchanged among the poorest.

The boat races were very unsatisfactory. The men did not row together; their boats were large and lumbering; there was no trimness, no order; the vehement cries and gesticulations of the coxswains forming a strange contrast to the loose, disorderly pulling, and provoking the incessant laughter of the spectators.

The "*course de bateaux étrangers*" began—said "*étrangers*" being two of the most villainous-looking crews that ever handled an oar, any national characteristic crushed out of their faces by the low monotonous brutality which made a strange resemblance among them.

A well-dressed man had been hanging about in front of the first row of seats, rousing the indignation of some of the older women by interrupting

their view of the sports, but smiled on by the younger ones, spite of the free, almost insolent, admiration he bestowed on them. He came up now and stood near Madame Triquet.

He was tall, stout, and what is often considered handsome; he had a fair, sunburnt complexion, with curly auburn hair and beard, a good nose and mouth, and bright blue eyes. To Désiré, who had been silently watching him, he looked a thorough coxcomb, all the more offensive from the well-to-do, purse-present consciousness every gesture betrayed.

La Veuve looked up suddenly, and caught Désiré's fixed gaze.

"Eh bien, mon garçon! what ails you? Why should you give such sour looks at your betters?"

She said it smilingly, as if she meant a rough joke; but he had already overstrained his forbearance towards her.

"Betters, madame!"—his eyes flashed, and he reddened deeply—"ma foi! you forget to whom you are speaking."

Madame Triquet burst out laughing, and Désiré saw his folly in a moment.

"Do you mean seriously to compare yourself," she said, "to Monsieur Auguste Leroux? Do you know that he has inherited all his father's money? Old Leroux is just dead, and he—that handsome young man—himself rents the large farm at Ardaine, the beautiful ruined abbey, with a fortune of hay and fodder inside, and another farm on the way to Augé."

She looked triumphant, as if to say, "Match that if you can!"

But the young soldier was not looking at her. Monsieur Auguste Leroux had approached nearer, and was regarding Marie with the most open admiration.

Just as Désiré, heated with jealousy, was going to jump over the two rows of seats to the front—his next move would perhaps have sent the Adonis of Ardaine into the Basin—the young farmer stood on one side, to allow an officer to pass by. It was Monsieur de Gagnac. He stopped and beckoned to Désiré, who sprang across the chairs, heartily

glad to find himself in front, where he could shelter Marie from insolent admiration far more easily than when standing behind her.

Monsieur de Gragnac had a message to send to his friend at Le Callac, and Désiré said he would call for it before he returned to Auge the next evening.

"Then you sleep in St. Roque to-night?"

"Yes, monsieur, at the house of the father of one of my comrades; it is the last Sunday I can spend with Marie"—he lowered his voice—"before—before—our marriage, and——" his eyes led the Captain's attention to Marie.

"Ah! I understand," said De Gragnac, with good-humoured pity. "Then in a month's time, Lelièvre, you mean to give up your liberty. Is that young lady your fiancée? I compliment you on her looks," he said, dropping his voice, as Désiré had done, "and I hope you may be as happy as you expect."

Monsieur Auguste Leroux had been thrown into the shade while this dialogue was going on, the interest of the spectators had been drawn to the

apparently confidential nature of the talk between Désiré and a captain with so many decorations; and when, after returning the young man's military salute, Monsieur de Gragnac gravely raised his cap to Marie and her mother, even La Veuve herself had no longer any eyes for the farmer.

She burst into an animated panegyric of the Captain's face, figure, manner, legs, and everything belonging to him, with a glibness truly worthy of her sex and nation.

Désiré seemed quite in her good books again. She perhaps considered the notice the Captain had bestowed had raised him in position, and the next time Monsieur Auguste passed, honouring Marie with one of his most deliberate stares, Madame Triquet whispered to her to frown, and bristled all over with the fierce virtue of her indignation.

Désiré felt relieved. After all, it was much better that he had not exposed Marie to remark by any public show of annoyance. Poor little dear! she could not help it if her pretty face attracted notice. No doubt the fellow's insolence had vexed her quite enough, without any further mortification.

And so, when the regatta was over, when the swimming-matches, evolutions on greased masts, and the duck chase, had all been greeted with vehement applause and laughter, the three returned to the patissier's in a far more amiable mood than when they had left it.

CHAPTER V.

What happened the Day after.

NEXT morning Désiré went with Marie and her mother to High Mass; but, coming out, he left them at the church door. It was better to get his instructions from Monsieur de Gragnac, and then he could spend all the rest of the afternoon quietly with his beloved, Madame Triquet having asked him to eat his mid-day breakfast with them. He was very loth to leave Marie to walk home without him, but he hurried off, past the church and the Place St. Pierre, and down the Rue St. Jean, to the turning leading to the old Oratorian convent where his officer had lodgings.

Very pleasant lodgings, in a quiet courtyard surrounded on two sides by what was left of the quaint old building. The picturesque dormers, with their grotesquely sculptured gables, were fringed below by a handsome cornice, with a broad band of Greek fret design, hidden in some places by the

luxuriant vine-branches, that not only covered the whole frontage but threw fresh green arms to the very summit of some of the gables. Just now the principal side of the building—no longer a convent, but occupied by a variety of tenants—was bathed in sunshine. Some of the windows, opening inwardly, showed an almost black darkness, framed by the intense green of clustering vine-leaves.

At one of these windows sat Monsieur de Gragnac, enjoying a book and a cigar. He smiled and nodded when he saw Désiré, bidding him come up at once. He gave him the message to his friend at Le Callac, and then, seeing the young soldier's confused hurried manner, he did not keep him long, but wished him good success in his new venture.

The Captain sat at the window watching Désiré as he re-crossed the court-yard with the springy, elastic step of a man who feels that Hope is leading him to Happiness.

Monsieur de Gragnac shrugged his shoulders. He was thinking of Désiré. He did not know how striking his own dark, martial face, with its stern

lips and piercing black eyes, looked in the green framework.

"He is a very fine fellow. I am sorry to lose him. I have never seen a trace of shirking in him. It is absurd in me to trouble myself so much about a man whose service has been so short, and yet I feel quite vexed that he is to marry that little girl. She is pretty; but that is all. I studied her face well yesterday, and I could see nothing in it to distinguish her from any other meek-looking, blue-eyed, fair-haired simpleton. She may be loving, but I doubt it; and a cold, quiet woman is always obstinate, and an obstinate woman is—— Poor Désiré!" The Captain's shoulders were again expressive, and he lit a fresh cigar, and turned to his novel, by way of distracting his sympathies.

Quite unconscious that he could be the object of any feeling but that of envy at his coming happiness, Désiré hastened on. As he crossed the Place St. Pierre, he had to make way for a melancholy procession—a priest, bearing the Host, hurrying at his utmost speed to some dying person, followed by his assistants, while beside him ran an old wo-

man, almost shrieking in her agony of mingled grief and impatience. Désiré crossed himself devoutly, and then he shuddered; it seemed like an ill omen on the threshold of his joy. Hastily he turned up the Rue Notre Dame—almost running till he reached the patissier's.

A man came out of the shop so suddenly that, if he had not turned in the opposite direction, he and the young soldier must have ran violently against one another. There was nothing unusual in seeing a customer come out of Madame Triquet's, especially on Sunday; but some undefined feeling made Désiré stand looking after this one instead of going into the shop. He had not seen the man's face, but there was something that roused unpleasant recollections in the bulky figure and assumptive walk.

Désiré started, and then turned scarlet with indignation. There could be no doubt about it; it was Monsieur Auguste Leroux.

"Well, Désiré, mon garçon; thou art hungry. Come in; breakfast will be served in an instant."

La Veuve was standing in the doorway. She

spoke with hearty good-humour. She either did not, or would not, see what Désiré was lingering for.

"Has Monsieur Leroux seen Marie? has he spoken to her?" he said passionately; he thought the widow was cajoling him.

"Seen Marie! what does the boy mean? Ma foi! art thou so jealous that a hungry man cannot come in and eat a brioche, but thou must think thy rights invaded? Ciel! thou art a veritable Barbe Bleue. Come and eat a brioche, too; jealousy only thrives on an empty stomach."

Marie received him affectionately. She seemed merrier than usual; her face was deeply flushed, and she was in a perfect flutter of excitement. Once, when her mother left the room for an instant, she contrived to whisper that she was sure Désiré had been vexed with her yesterday, and she had been trying to think what she could have done to deserve it.

"And it has made me so sorry, Désiré!"

Her tender blue eyes looked very soft as she said this, and her round bloom-like cheek nestled itself so closely against his shoulder, that Désiré

could only wonder at his happiness in having gained the love of such a little angel. He had just time to tell her so before La Veuve came back.

There was no repose in Madame Triquet, and her rapid, vivacious speech rendered this still more fatiguing.

"Eh bien!"—she came in almost breathless with haste—"we shall be late at Vespers. Do you know, my children, that unpunctuality is ruin both to purse and mind? Come, come, Marie! where is the shawl? Come, Désiré, look alive, or I shall have to start by myself."

If Désiré had believed this last threat, he would have sat still; but he knew that it was only just half-past one, and that vespers at St. Pierre began at two o'clock. The only way of quieting his tormentor was to affect readiness.

Service was soon over. As they came out of church they met the young farmer Leroux face to face; and to Désiré's intense surprise, he first raised his hat, and then shook hands with Madame, and nodded to Marie, almost familiarly.

Leroux placed himself before them, so as almost

to prevent their progress; but La Veuve had taken the soldier's arm, and Désiré now closed it so firmly on her hand, and pushed forward so resolutely, that the farmer was obliged to make way.

Désiré looked quickly at Marie.

She was laughing, positively laughing; but whether at Leroux's discomfiture, or at the frown on his own face, he could not feel sure.

He was not left in doubt.

"Ma foi, Désiré!" said Madame Triquet's sharp, shrill voice, "thou forgettest that thou art not the only man in the world with eyes. Pretty girls are made to be looked at."

And before he could answer, Marie's sweet tones whispered—

"Thou must not be jealous, Désiré. I should never live happily with a jealous husband!"

He was too deeply wounded to speak now. He told himself he was not jealous; and he told himself also that if Marie really loved him, she would not have laughed, especially before her mother, at anything that vexed him.

But as soon as they reached home again, and

she said, in her pretty winning way, how different next Sunday would be, and how triste everything would seem till his return, his ideas underwent a change. He called himself a jealous tyrant, and an ill-tempered one, too; and when the time came for starting homewards, it was all but impossible to tear himself away.

There were tears in Marie's blue eyes as she said her last good-bye; there was a glisten even in those of her mother. Madame Triquet kissed Désiré on both cheeks, calling him "her poor Céline's boy" as she did so, and then both mother and daughter stood on the door-step, and watched him down the street.

CHAPTER VI.

The Fisherman's Secret.

DÉSIRÉ walked along happily enough at first. It was not yet five o'clock; the diligence had not started, but he must travel very early next morning, and he felt it was wiser not to walk. He had still some matters to settle with his father before leaving home—he might just as well wait for the diligence in the fields as in the dusty streets. He walked on till the open country lay before him, and then he turned round and looked at St. Roque. There it lay, basking in the warm sunshine. Except the bell for second vespers sounding in a little village church on the right, and the cry of the crickets in the grass, the city lay silent, as if in sleep. Though only two miles distant, not a sound or sight disturbed the stillness; the only sign of existence was the curling smoke of the steamer as, leaving the harbour, it took its way along the river; the very plough stood still, resting in the midst of a half-

completed furrow. All spoke of ineffable peace. Désiré's thoughts wandered off to the new home he was contemplating. Ah, how full of love and peace it would be! Marie should never shed the tears his mother had so often shed from anxiety at her husband's long absences, or from sorrow at his unkindness; as he thought of his mother, his spirits sank.

Hers had been a love-marriage—at least, he had been told so—and yet, ever since he could remember her, she was far oftener sad than merry; not complaining—her patient gentleness had been one of the causes of alienation between himself and his father; even as a young child he had felt, rather than understood, that the cold, indifferent, sometimes harsh treatment she met with was an ill return for her goodness.

Could he ever grow hard and sneering as his father had become? He thought of Marie, and this seemed impossible; there was but one thing that could make him cease to love her, and that would be if, after she became his wife, she did not return his love warmly. "And I should never have thought

of such a thing if Monsieur de Gragnac had not put it in my head. But I am foolish!"

However foolish it might be, the thought was not to be easily dismissed. And then another, which had been kept away, came and joined company with it. Ought not Marie to have been angry with Leroux when she saw how vexed he himself looked? and instead, she had smiled when the farmer nodded to her, and then had laughed at Désiré's annoyance. But, no; he would not be jealous. It was natural that a pretty girl should like to be admired. It would all come right when they were married; he could speak kindly and seriously to her then, without fear of La Veuve's interference. Marie was so naturally good and gentle, she would be just like his mother. Ah, if she had only lived to bless their marriage!

Here the arrival of the diligence broke up the stillness and his reveries, and he soon found himself approaching home. He left the vehicle at the cross road; but although he was close to his father's cottage, he did not enter it. It was not quite dark yet; he thought he would take a turn along the

sea-shore. He could not face his father with his mind full of his mother's constant unhappiness.

A few steps on he met Mimi Fayel. The girl tried to pass him, but Désiré placed himself in front of her. She looked sad, he thought, and just then he remembered how fond his mother had always been of Mimi.

"Bon soir, Mimi! What do you do with yourself?—one never sees you."

Mimi looked up at him, and she smiled. She had a wide mouth, but her smile showed that rarity in a Norman peasant, white and regular teeth. There was a singular shy sweetness in the look she now raised to Désiré.

"But you are so seldom in Auge, Monsieur Désiré. Ma foi! you are always on the road." And then she blushed violently.

"Well, Mimi, I think you know what I go to St. Roque for. Will you not give me your congratulations?" and he held out his hand.

Mimi's colour flickered, and then she looked steadily in the young soldier's face.

"I have heard, Monsieur Désiré; and if you are

as happy as I wish you to be, you will be content. I am glad, too, you are going away from Auge. You could not be happy here, let Jacques say what he will. Bon soir!"

She passed on, but the deprecating look which had come with her last words puzzled Désiré.

He walked on the sands at first; the tide was rising fast, and he was forced to keep along the road beyond them, overshadowed by the dark grey cliffs. His thoughts turned quickly from Mimi to his father. What could be the meaning of his strange looks and ways? Grief for his wife's death, and a tinge of remorse for his conduct to her, might account for his avoidance of human fellowship; but not for those shuddering starts and the livid paleness that at times so alarmed his son.

Suddenly Désiré stood still, arrested by a new fear that dawned on him.

Was his father mad?

But after a minute's reflection he told himself no; it was impossible. No man could be so intelligent and accurate in business matters whose mind

was sufficiently deranged to cause such startling emotion.

Désiré had paused just where the cliffs, or rather mud hills—the soil pulverized so easily that they were constantly taking new forms—were cleft by the dry bed of what was in winter-time a small river. Even now, in daylight, you could track its course for some distance by the masses of rock among which it ran.

Without thinking where he was going, absorbed in the strange mystery that shrouded his father, he wandered up the cleft. Suddenly he stumbled over one of the rocky projections, and uttered a loud exclamation as he saved himself from falling.

From whence he knew not, but seemingly from the stones close beside him, a man sprung on Désiré with an open knife in his hand. As the indistinct light shimmered on the blade it revealed the features of Martin Lelièvre.

The recognition was mutual. Had it not been so, Désiré's life would have paid the forfeit of his paralyzing surprise.

Not a word was spoken. The two men's arms

sank to their sides as they stood face to face in the darkness.

At length the old man spoke.

"What dost thou mean by coming upon me in that sudden manner, like a thief or a spy? Couldst thou not have stayed quiet till I came in?"

He began in a low hesitating voice; but as he went on, his old bullying manner returned.

"I have not been home at all. I did not know that thou wast not in the cottage."

Désiré scarcely knew what he said. He was overpowered with horror; for if his father had not recognized him he would be now a murderer. He felt stunned and stupefied.

"Sapristi! what couldst thou be wanting up among the rocks?" Martin spoke much more coolly now. "Cannot I scrape for myself a few mussels, but I am to be watched and pryed after? The child that lifts the kettle lid runs a chance of being scalded with the steam, and thou seest my knife and thy throat might have had a nearer acquaintance than would have been pleasant for either of us. Now come home to supper."

He wiped his knife as he spoke, thrust it into its leather sheath in the belt that fastened his trousers over his dark-blue jersey, and then led the way home.

Désiré followed silently. What was his father doing in that lonely place? for, as to the story of the mussels, they were so abundant on the small rocks near the cottage, that it was scarcely likely Martin would have gone so far to seek them. Why should he be so anxious not to be followed or watched?

Try as Désiré would to stifle it, a fearful solution seemed to be offered to his doubts about his father. It was said in St. Roque that there were fishermen along that rocky coast who robbed and murdered shipwrecked sailors. Was Martin one of these? Would he have been so ready to take life without even the provocation of self-defence? If—but Désiré could not face the “if”—Martin was his father, what right had a child to judge a parent? But the longer he pondered over what had happened, the more conscious he became that the feeling of his father’s knife at his throat had worked a

strange revolution in him; the shrinking of former years was now almost loathing, and when the fisherman retired into the inner room, where the two beds were, Désiré felt that nothing could induce him to pass the night in the same chamber with his father.

His first resolve was to keep awake, and think over this strange meeting. Spite of his previous reasoning, the belief in Martin's insanity seemed forced on him; it was the only safe solution of his strange conduct. The hours rolled on; the heavy breathing from the next room told how soundly Martin was sleeping.

Désiré's head drooped forwards, his body began to sway gently to and fro, and finally nearly overbalanced itself, for there was no back to the settle on which he sat. The fatigue and excitement of the two previous days began to call for reparation. He got up mechanically, flung a rough coat on the ground, and lay down on it, almost asleep before he reached it.

It seemed to him that he had scarcely been asleep five minutes, when he found himself at once

broad awake, with all his senses on the alert; there was none of the twilight-like drowsiness that usually prevents a whole knowledge of one's surroundings, it was more like the work of some invisible agency; he was shuddering from head to foot, his hair lifted from his forehead, and yet he had not stirred.

The fire was out, and the room on that side lay in complete darkness. Without moving even so much as to raise himself on his elbow, Désiré glanced instinctively at the other side where the door was that divided him from the sleeper.

The sleeper!—he listened intently; the deep breathing had ceased; and while he still waited for it, telling himself that his hearing had not yet fully awakened, there came the scrape of a lucifer-match, and a faint glimmer of light under the door of the inner room. Before Désiré could move the door was gently opened, and his father stood on the threshold.

For a moment the soldier debated with himself whether he should show consciousness of what was happening; and then he thought, if his father really were mad, would not this second intrusion into

what was evidently some mystery perhaps excite him even more violently than the first had done?

Désiré was brave; but his father's knife had been raised against him once that evening, and he could scarcely help trying to shield his throat as the fisherman stealthily advanced. But Martin Lelièvre's practised eyes would have detected the slightest movement; and when Désiré saw the lamp held close to his face he no longer dared watch through his half-closed eyelids, lest the quivering of the lashes should betray him.

The fisherman seemed satisfied with his scrutiny; he passed stealthily on to the outer door, opened it gently, and then closed and locked it after him, leaving the lamp burning in the angle farthest from Désiré, behind the projecting fireplace.

The young man had not calculated on this imprisonment; he had meant to follow his father cautiously, and strive to solve those terrible doubts, so as to decide how to act, for it seemed to him that Martin had become quite unfit to be left unwatched. He could not get out by either of the windows; during his son's absence in Italy the

fisherman had fixed iron bars across both, so close together that even a child could not have squeezed its way in or out; and when Désiré had inquired the reason of this, his father had rudely told him to mind his own matters.

There was nothing to do but wait; but Désiré could not lie there inactive. He sprang up, and paced up and down the cottage. What might be happening now? What could his father have been doing with a knife at that time of night? and why had he been so fearful of discovery?

Désiré had essentially a man's mind, without any of the fertile flights and witch-like divination which so often lead a woman, as if by instinct, to the truth. He could only puzzle over his own questions.

It seemed hours to him before his father returned. The wind had risen in the night, and the voice of the waves, as they struggled against it, completely muffled the sound of approaching footsteps. Fortunately the lock of the door was rusty, and the key turned slowly, or Désiré would not

have had time to stretch himself again on the floor and feign slumber.

When his father went out he was muffled in an old boat-cloak, but certainly he was empty-handed, for he had changed the lamp from one hand to another, in order to look at his son; now he seemed staggering with the weight of what he carried.

He set his burden down on the kitchen-table, and then, stealing softly to where he had placed the lamp, he raised it, and held it close to the young man's eyes.

But Désiré had had time for recollection; not an eyelash stirred; he was to all appearance sound asleep. The old man turned to the table, and carried part of his burden into the inner room.

In a few moments he came back; his face was turned away from Désiré, so that the young man could watch without fear of discovery, still maintaining the regular breathing of a deep sleeper. His father approached the table again, and seemed to lift whatever it was that he had left upon it with difficulty.

The lamp was almost burnt out, and although

he strained his sight to the utmost, the young soldier could not see what it was that Martin carried so carefully into the inner room.

But he gave a hasty guess—his mind felt easier now; doubtless his father had some private hoard of which he knew nothing, and he had brought it for safety to the cottage. This would account for the iron bars, his terror at Désiré's sudden appearance—for everything, in fact, that had so disturbed his son.

The young soldier felt relieved, almost thankful; and the sudden lull of the intense strain he had been putting on all outward movement soon brought back the sound sleep from which he had been so strangely awakened.

CHAPTER VII.

Marie's first Letter.

WHEN Désiré roused next morning, his father was already heating their soup over the fire.

"Thou hadst best bestir thyself, or thou wilt miss the diligence, unless maybe thou goest to Le Callac on thy feet."

He spoke roughly, and Désiré did not answer. His luggage was soon ready; but when he went into the inner room for some of his belongings left there, the old man followed him, and stood in the doorway watching his movements.

There was nothing unusual to be seen in the room, and, but for this suspicious action, Désiré would have been tempted to think he had dreamed. However, there was no time for thought: it was a relief to be thus hurried. His father followed him out of the cottage, and they reached the cross-road just as the diligence did. Désiré could only wave a hasty adieu and spring up into the interior.

A fortnight passed away at Le Callac very pleasantly for Désiré, so far as his master and his outward life went. He found himself in a more beautiful country than any he had seen near St. Roque. The land round Château Callac was far more picturesque; instead of the level meadows, fringed with tall poplars, and often partially submerged from the overflow of the Orne or the canal, there were gentle hills, and sloping valleys clothed in verdure—for there was no visible corn-land—and planted with fruit trees of all sorts, realizing, now that their rich harvest hung ripe and luxuriant, the jewelled trees of Aladdin's cave; ruddy and rosy apples, golden apricots, crimsoned peaches, mingled with the darker splendour of the royal purple plums.

Houses were to be found at distant intervals; there were no poor cottages in this Eden of plenty, but comfortable farmsteads, sheltering the few assistants necessary to herd the cattle and horses which fed on the bright grass of the orchards.

On the domain of the seigneur to whom Désiré now belonged were a few small thatched cottages,

one of which was to be his future home, and all his leisure was spent in trying to form a garden for Marie out of the orchard which surrounded it. He had made friends with the gardener, and had begged sundry roots from him, and two young apricot trees to plant on each side of the cottage door. He was busy digging holes in readiness for these trees when the letter-carrier passed on his way up to the château.

Désiré cleared the gate of his little domain at a bound. The only drawback to his happiness at Callac had been Marie's silence. He knew she could write easily, and she had not sent him a word, while he, poor fellow, had managed already to scrawl her three very loving letters.

He soon overtook the postman. Yes, there was a letter for Monsieur Lelièvre; was he quite sure that he was the right person? Time seemed so long to Désiré while the postman was fumbling in his wallet, that his fingers itched to help in the search.

Here was the letter at last. He jumped over the gate again, and flung himself down on the

grass, in front of his cottage—to be Marie's cottage soon.

The letter felt thick; it was a long one then, to make up for lost time. He examined the subscription lovingly; the handwriting was a woman's, but he did not think it was Marie's.

He opened it with the careful manner of a man little troubled with correspondents.

There were two enclosures.

He looked at the signature of the first: it was Triquet-Coulard. Ah! and the other was from Marie. He should read that.

He opened it, and his eager expectant look clouded. There were but two or three lines of writing, beginning "Monsieur," and signed "Marie."

He read them over several times before he could take in their sense. Was he stupefied, or was it really incomprehensible? Presently he laid down Marie's letter, and turned despairingly to Madame Triquet's, as if to find a key to the mystery.

Marie's letter had only told him that she felt he was not likely to make her happy, and that therefore she renounced the honour of being his wife.

This was so unexpected, so utterly at variance with his belief in his future wife's truth and constancy, that it had utterly bewildered Désiré; but as he read La Veuve's letter indignation absorbed every other feeling. Madame Triquet confirmed Marie's sentence, and told Désiré that there was no use in his making any fuss or opposition, as her daughter decidedly preferred another person, and she was not a mother likely to force her only child's inclinations—"to make what should be a blessing, a curse."

He crushed the letter in his hand, and then trampled it into the ground.

"The old hypocrite!" he exclaimed; "I see it all, and it has been all her doing. I know Marie has been made to write that letter against her will. Poor little thing! she is constrained. What do I know? ill-treated, perhaps!"

Did he say this to himself because the tormenting doubts about her want of love, which had been less audible since he left St. Roque, now rose and clamoured loudly? It may have been so; but it

was also a part of his nature that he would believe the best of her that was possible.

There was no time to be wasted in guessing the meaning of this riddle; he must know the truth at once. With soldierly neatness he shovelled the earth back again into the two holes he had dug, so that the vine which covered the porched doorway might not suffer from the exposure, replaced his spade in his little outhouse, and then took his way up to the château.

He must tell his master that a great trouble threatened him; must happen, indeed, if he did not at once return to St. Roque.

And if leave of absence were refused him? Bah! where was the use of meeting evil on the road? it would be granted. At the worst, he could throw up this new employment; for if he lost Marie, of what value was it?

But he was not so tried. He met the head-gardener of Le Callac on his way. The gardener had heard from Désiré of his approaching marriage, and without asking questions, with the ready tact of a Frenchman, he understood what this trouble

the young man told him of threatened. He at once undertook to fill Désiré's post in his two days' absence, supposing the master should grant leave.

There was no diligence till next morning; and after his interview with his master was over, the day did indeed seem long to Désiré. He had too much time for thought now. He went over again and again the two last days he had spent with Marie. Yes, he knew he had been unreasoning and exacting; but he could explain it all away and she would forgive him.

It was her mother's fault; if Madame Triquet had not become so singularly irritating, all would have gone well. And then he remembered with despair that when he saw Marie all his explanations and excuses must be made in her mother's presence. Ah!—he ground his teeth as he thought this—if Madame Triquet had her deserts, she would have been ducked in the river long ago.

At first the mention in the letter of Marie's preference for another person had seemed to him an idle falsehood, merely invented to make him break off the marriage in disgust; but as he reflected

on the widow's late rudeness, he began to see that there was something hidden under it all. He remembered the regatta; and then, on Sunday, the sudden exit of Auguste Leroux from the shop.

He saw it all now. When first he had asked Marie in marriage the old miser, Leroux, was still alive; the son was a mere nobody, dependent on his father, stinted in every way, and doubtless the portion that Martin Lelièvre had offered with his son had tempted La Veuve. It was Leroux's new fortune that had induced Madame Triquet to try to secure so rich a husband for Marie, and she had taken advantage of Désiré's absence to bring it about. But he would thwart her, the villainous intriguer! He strode up and down his bed-room half the night, rehearsing the reproaches by which he would show Marie's mother the impossibility of retracting her solemn pledge, without manifesting herself a perjured woman in the eyes of her neighbours.

The idea of Marie sacrificed to a selfish coxcomb like Leroux drove him almost frantic. But it was a relief to have thought of him; it was im-

possible that Marie could love such an upstart, such a self-sufficient idiot—she was not a free agent, poor child! Her mother, doubtless, intended the marriage, and hoped by Désiré's continued absence to bring it to pass.

“Yes, yes; I see her whole game now, the old witch!” he said, throwing himself at last on his bed, worn out with doubt and anxiety. “She knows my proud temper, and she thought that I should be too much huffed to trouble my head about her for a bit, and that she would make the best use of her time; but, *gare à vous*, La Veuve, I'm not going to dig up sand-eels for others to bag. I'm too old a fisherman to haul in an empty net! We shall see which wins yet, you or me, Madame Triquet-Coulard!”

Désiré had to walk some distance next morning to meet the diligence; but he was ready, waiting for it, long before it arrived. It was the best part of a day's journey to St. Roque; across country the distance could not have exceeded thirty miles, but from the circuitous route the diligence took along the coast—stopping either at or near each one of

the fishing and bathing villages that stud the Norman coast from the mouth of the Orne to Honfleur—it was really much longer.

At another time these stoppages and the jokes consequent on the arrival of new passengers would have amused Désiré, for he was always merry and frank-hearted with strangers—ready to fraternize with them with the ease of a Frenchman of his class. Now every delay was annoying and wearisome. He had decided to go straight on to St. Roque, and learn his fate that afternoon. He should pass close to Augé; but he should not stop there if he made all right again between himself and Marie. Why need his father know there had ever been any disagreement?

The diligence was by this time crowded with passengers, all bound for St. Roque—a very incongruous medley, from the squire or small seigneur in the coupé, to a country girl in the interior going into town service for the first time in her life. Though her eyes were still red with crying, she munched away with a seemingly hearty and unappeasable appetite at a long dark-coloured loaf,

which she kept under one arm, flavouring it by an occasional bite at one of a bunch of rosy onions that peeped from under her cloak.

Désiré had just congratulated himself that there could be no more stoppages, when a shrill voice from the roadside demanded a place in the name of *miséricorde et cinq sous*!

"There is no place," said Désiré rather savagely, to the conducteur as he opened the door, "and you know it! You will be very late as it is, without stopping any more."

"Pardon, monsieur!" And then the conducteur pointed out to the servant girl and a *sœur* who sat beside her that if they squeezed a little, the poor woman who was so urgent for a place could be admitted.

"She is very tired," he said; "and if we don't take her up, she says she'll not reach her home to-night."

"Ah, la pauvre bonne mère!" from the onion-eating maid, and a bright smile from the *sœur*, as each drew her petticoats into the smallest space, and Désiré's objections were silenced.

A loud-voiced, bright-eyed, skinny woman squeezed herself in between them.

"*Servante, mamzelle; et mille pardons ma révérende!*" and then she looked smilingly across at Désiré.

"Eh? *mon beau monsieur*, but it was rather hard of you, was it not, to wish to make a poor widow, who has been working all day for the little girl at home, trudge along the stony, dusty road to St. Roque?—to St. Roque! *ma foi*, if it were only to St. Roque! Now, I wager that you will never guess how much farther I have yet to go this night."

She had kept her eyes fixed on Désiré, and had quickly noted his abstraction; but, woman-like, this only strengthened her inclination to talk to him.

"*Monsieur is militaire?*" she said deferentially. He nodded.

"Ah, yes! I should have known it at once. *Monsieur* has a noble figure *militaire*; but I remember him now—I saw him enter St. Roque the day the troops did. And I too, *monsieur*, am of the army; I am a widow of a corporal of the line. Ah! the good man that he was to me, my poor

dear Chuquet! only, you see"—she wiped her eyes rapidly with the only vacant corner of her blue apron, the rest being tied up in a bundle—"he never spent more than a few weeks with me; but I loved him all the same, and for him I love all soldiers, mon beau garçon! And you are in trouble—I know it, I see it. Repose your confidence in me as in a mother; the soldiers call me La Mère Chuquet!"

She paused for an instant, not from want of breath or words—both seemed as inexhaustible as those of the barber with many brothers—but to give Désiré an opportunity of answering. He only smiled, by way of keeping down his impatience.

"C'est ça! I understand," his tormentor went on, "we are too public; we will choose another moment. If you are making a stay at St. Roque, we will meet again, my soldier. And all this time I have never told you, and especially these good ladies"—she nodded to her neighbours, who seemed far more amused than Désiré—"where I have to go this night, and why I am so thankful to the Bon Dieu to have been spared the toilsome journey on

this stony road. Ah! mais oui" — with a strong emphasis on the first word—"perhaps you would not believe it, to hear how well I speak, but I am only a poor field-hand, and I have to live at La Maladrerie, for I work on the fields of Monsieur Leroux, the rich farmer of Ardaine."

Désiré started; the name aroused him from a deep reverie.

The sharp-witted woman saw that he was listening at last.

"Eh, mon Dieu! you know Monsieur Auguste? He is a fine gentleman, is he not? and he is going to marry a pretty wife."

Désiré had felt inclined to stifle her; but now he listened eagerly and impatiently while she explained to the smiling maid-servant that Monsieur Leroux owned another farm—Varentan—where she had been working for the last three days, and whence she was now returning.

"And I am glad to come back," she went on, "not only to embrace my little Elise, but because I would not, for all in the world, miss Monsieur Auguste's wedding. His wife will not have much

of a dowry, they say—only her looks. She is the daughter of old Triquet, the patissier of the Rue Notre Dame. Aha! monsieur, you like to hear of pretty girls, do you? so did my poor dear Chuquet. You look as excited as an old monsieur I met yesterday, to whom I told the news. Ma foi! how glad I am to feel the jolt of the stones! and there is the flèche of St. Pierre, and here we are—arrived. Bon soir, monsieur et dames. I have still some hours to spend in St. Roque, so you will let me pass out first.”

She had jumped down into the street before Désiré had recovered himself.

Was it real, this which he had been listening to, or only idle chatter? And this woman had been three days away from St. Roque since she had heard the news; the marriage must have been decided before Marie wrote. His heart swelled with indignation at her treachery; but no! he would not pre-judge her; she might be her mother's unwilling victim. Her own lips should decide his opinion.

CHAPTER VIII.

Convinced.

"WILL it convince you if you hear from Marie herself that she prefers Auguste Leroux?"

Madame Triquet spoke in very subdued accents. She had been taken by surprise by Désiré's sudden appearance, and his vehement reproaches and stern refusal to believe that Marie had any share in what he told her was a base conspiracy against him, had for the time both cowed and terrified the widow. She valued her good name as much as money, and it was not pleasant to hear Désiré threaten to proclaim her through St. Roque as a perjured woman, who had entered into a fresh contract with one suitor before breaking off with the other.

When first he entered the shop demanding to see Marie, Madame Triquet contemptuously refused him; now it seemed wiser to conciliate him.

"Yes, I will be satisfied," he said sternly, then fixing his eyes on the widow, till she felt made of

glass and that he was looking through her, "if I see her alone, and hear her speak her own words; not yours, Madame——"

La Veuve wrung her hands. It was impossible; she was going to add, Monsieur Leroux would not like it, but Désiré's glance kept her in check.

"I shall not move from here, Madame," he said gravely, "till I have spoken to Marie alone."

The widow saw that he was determined, and she yielded sooner than he expected. It was perhaps well to keep guard in the shop in case of Leroux's sudden appearance.

How wonderfully strange to Désiré the familiar place had grown in two short weeks! It seemed as if Marie must have grown strange too. But, no; the inner door of the little parlour stood open, and there she was coming down the narrow stairs as fresh, as bright as ever.

Désiré did not speak till Madame Triquet had passed on into the shop, then he deliberately closed the door after her, and turned to Marie.

"Marie, what is all this? Why didst thou write

me that letter?" He went up to her and took her hand gently.

"Oh, mon Dieu, Désiré, I am frightened! My mother says you are so angry with me. Is it true?" She began to cry.

"Tell me, my beloved, is there any reason why I should be angry with thee, Marie?"

He spoke kindly and quietly, but there was a wounded tone in his voice — something in her manner had changed after all, and she pertinaciously avoided looking him in the face.

"Ah, but that is it, Désiré Lelièvre; you are always so wise and so serious, I am always afraid of making you angry, and yet I don't know how, I'm sure. Oh! I am very, very unhappy."

She began to cry again, sobbing violently and covering her face with her hands.

Désiré seemed to himself to be in a dream. What did it all mean? Marie had never behaved in this way before. Had La Veuve spoken the truth? And then he remembered that this was doubtless the result of her mother's tutoring, and he resolved to make her speak her own sentiments.

"God knows, my beloved"—he tried to draw her hands away from her face—"how ardently I long to make thy happiness, and how grieved I am if I am the cause of thy tears; but there is some mistake between us. Tell me what it is, my own Marie, tell me"—he tried to draw her towards him, but she shook her head—"tell me first why didst thou write that letter?"

Marie felt ill-used and sulky. She had at first refused to come down to see Désiré, but La Veuve had told her exactly what to do and say, and it had seemed so easy that at length she ventured. Her mother had said she was to take a high hand, stating her grievances and her reason for breaking with him. She was on no account to cry.

La Veuve had shrewdly calculated that cold self-possession would convince the young man more effectually than any reasoning, but she had not also calculated on the influence Désiré still possessed over Marie. So far as she understood the meaning of the word love, the shallow-hearted girl had loved him, and now the first glimpses of his frank manly face put to flight all her ready-

prepared speeches. At the same time she was so discomfited by her own want of self-control, that she was angry with herself and all around her.

Instead of answering Désiré's last question, she hung down her head and sobbed again.

"Come, Marie," said Désiré, "let us be friends—as if nothing had happened between us. I promise never to vex thee again, dear child, and thou wilt forget that cruel letter to me!"

His voice was agitated with repressed tenderness, for he wished to win her gently till she became calmer. Marie's quick ear heard his changed tone—she saw her regained power, and her sobs ceased.

"Then you love me still, after all?" she said poutingly.

Désiré's answer was more in gesture than words, but she raised her hand warningly between them.

"We can still be friends"—this was a bit of her mother's lesson, and she went on glibly—"but, Monsieur Lelièvre, we cannot be anything more to each other!"

She spoke simply, in her usual sweet voice.

A horrible feeling of disappointment, and of having been duped, came over Désiré.

It suddenly seemed to him that the girl who spoke was the Marie he had always known, and that the pettish sulky child of five minutes ago was the true daughter of Madame Triquet. Had she never loved him at all? had all been a sweet-spoken deceit?

The blood rushed to his temples, and then retreating, left him so deathlike in colour, even to his firmly compressed lips, that Marie felt strangely frightened; she stood looking at him as if she were spell-bound.

"Is this your own choice, or has any one else forced it upon you?"

Under his stern eyes she dared not tell the falsehood she had been taught.

"My mother showed me," she almost whispered, "we—we were not suited; and then—and besides——"

She left off, either unable to go on or because she hoped she had said enough.

Spite of the dire conviction at his heart, he made one more effort to regain her.

"Oh, Marie! and thou wilt cast me off without giving me a hearing—without telling me how it is that I am unsuited to be thy husband? Marie, there is time still—tell me!"

One would have thought the thrilling tones of his voice must have moved her; but, alas, no. His words had supplied the link to the next sentence she had been taught, and she was too eager to get through her task creditably to be turned aside. Besides, her mother's last whisper—

"A real cashmere—silk dresses—a visit to Paris, perhaps, who knows, my child?" sounded louder still than the throb of Désiré's voice against her heartstrings.

"It is I, Désiré, who am more unsuited to be your wife than you to be my husband. I don't complain of you unless you scold me." She spoke more earnestly, for she had meant to have begun thus; and it was a part in which her heart really was interested. She did not want to lose his good opinion altogether. "I had scarcely ever spoken to

any man till I saw you; and I was so young, and you asked me so soon after you came back, and I liked you, and so I said, Yes. But I am sure I could not be happy with a poor man. There are things I wish for more than a husband, Désiré, and you could not give me these. And——”

“And Auguste Leroux can!” He grasped her arm so firmly that she could not wrest it from him, although she tried to turn away and hide her face. Ah, what other confirmation did he want? He was answered. He paused.

“Marie,” he said at last hoarsely, “I cannot reproach you. If I told you what is in my heart—about your conduct—I should make you too unhappy. And I have loved you—remember that—so well, Marie,” he spoke very bitterly, “that I can never love woman again—for if you are so false, what are the rest?”

He dropped her arm, and then passed through the shop without taking any notice of La Veuve. Madame Triquet was not prepared for his sudden exit, or she would perhaps have been a little farther from the parlour door.

CHAPTER IX.

Mimi.

MIMI FAYEL was sitting in her brother's cottage at Augé—the black tulle veil she had been sprigging so deftly lay in her lap, her hands were idle, and her eyes were looking, not at her work, but were bent on the distant expanse of sea that showed through the open doorway.

Mimi had learned her own secret since Désiré's return from Italy. She knew now that the vague unrest and discontent that had possessed her since Madame Lelièvre's death were signs and tokens of love. The first sight of the young soldier had told her this.

Mimi had grown very thin and pale lately. She had been able to look frankly into her old playmate's face and to congratulate him on his happiness, and she had done this sincerely; for Mimi could not have spoken an untrue word. But the bitter struggles, the sharp heart-wrenches of agony

that had come first, were all hidden away in the young girl's heart, only betrayed outwardly by scalding tears as she knelt in her little bed-room before the rude crucifix Désiré's mother had given her years ago.

But Mimi's was not a selfish love. "If Désiré is happy, I must be happy too," she said, "or I am no better than the wicked woman in the Breton tale, who ate her son's heart because he loved his wife better than his mother. It is all very well of Jacques to mock at Marie Triquet; but she must be good as well as pretty, or Désiré would not love her."

Poor faithful Mimi! Her idol could not do wrong in her eyes.

Yesterday Jacques Fayel had brought home the news that Marie had broken her engagement with Désiré, and was promised to Auguste Leroux.

This news had kindled Mimi's anger. But her heart was large; small feelings did not seem at home there. All she thought of now was Désiré's sorrow. As yet, of course, he knew nothing, for Le Callac seemed to Mimi a distant country. And

then, as her work fell from her hands, and she sat thinking, searching with her tired eyes the far distant shadowy cloud-line that melted into the sea, an idea presented itself—a way of escape from this sorrow for Désiré.

Marie was very young, two years younger than she herself was. Might it not be possible that the girl had been over-persuaded by her mother, and, in Désiré's absence, had not sufficiently valued the treasure she was yielding up? If any friend of Désiré's pleaded for him, would not Marie listen?

And strong temptation whispered to Mimi, "No; it is best as it is. If she does not value him, she could never make him happy. They had best live apart." And a look of joyous hope broke forth on the pale truthful face.

Mimi rose up and laid aside her work. It seemed to her she must fling away this sudden joy, this rising hope, with all her strength, or it would master her and make her wicked.

She crossed herself devoutly, and then she knelt down and prayed for Marie, and for Désiré, and for herself.

She rose up paler than ever, but with a settled look on her face.

"I will go to St. Roque," she said. "I have often wished to see Marie Triquet; I will see her, too, when her mother is not by, and I will make her promise to keep true to Désiré. She must tell him what has happened with Auguste Leroux, of course. She must not keep a secret from her husband; but Désiré need not know it till he returns from Le Callac: it would be too cruel if he learned it there."

She went to the armoire, got out her Sunday cap—only distinguished by a finer lace and an embroidered headband, for Mimi was not rich enough to wear a bourgeoise cap: she was only a peasant, though, thanks to Monsieur le Curé of St. Julien, the nearest parish to Auge, she was a fair scholar.

Her cap-strings were not tied when a shadow darkened the doorway—the shadow of a rough, square-shouldered fisherman, with a huge sausage under one arm.

"Eh bien, Mimi! Where art thou off to in such fine feathers?"

Mimi blushed. She knew that her brother did not suspect her love for his friend, and she could confess her errand.

"I am going to St. Roque, Jacques."

The fisherman's face clouded.

"What gadabouts you women are—and worse—changeable as the wind! Women—I believe I'm tired of the lot of you." He stood in the doorway, his sausage still under his arm. It seemed as if his words had been pent in some time, they came tumbling out so fast. "Who do you think I saw in St. Roque this afternoon?—maybe he's there now."

Mimi knew by instinct, but she asked who it was.

"Dame! it was Désiré Lelièvre; and I saw him going in at the door of the old Triquet, the old traitress. I never thought that little pink-faced chit Marie a worthy wife for my friend; and now that he should reap mortification from such a crooked choice! It is too much; ma foi! it is not to be borne. And here I am, tired, hungry—what do I say?—with my heart pierced at the thought of my com-

rade's trouble, and I find my sister going out to take her amusement!"

He strode into the room, his heavy sabots clattering on the tiled floor, and seated himself with his back towards Mimi.

She stood a minute, and then she unfastened her pretty headband, loosened the tape-strings which drew her cap into a close-fitting shape, and replaced it in its paper wrapping in the armoire.

From a cupboard in the wall she brought out a very long dark-coloured loaf and a jug of cider, and set them on the round table in the centre of the cottage.

She tried to busy herself, but her heart was aching sorely. It was all over then—she was too late to help Désiré.

"Why, what is this?" said Jacques Fayel. "Why, Mimi, thou art as changeable as Marie Triquet! A minute ago thou wast decked out for a junketing, and now——"

"Allez," she interrupted, "I am not quite so bad as thou thoughtest, Jacques. I must see thee eat something. Come, where is the sausage?"

Jacques patted her hand and said, half to himself, half to her, that she was a good girl, worth six Marie Triquets. He had not meant what he said, but the words made his sister glad to turn away.

When he had ended his meal, he smoked for some time in silence, while Mimi cleared away the fragments, and went back to her work.

"Mimi," said Jacques Fayel suddenly, "hast thou seen Martin Lelièvre to-day?"

"No, I have not seen him; but that is nothing unusual. I do not often see him."

Her brother got up, and came close to her.

"I, too, have not seen him for days; and Désiré has written to me to ask if his father is well, and if he goes out fishing as usual. Martin has hardly been out since Désiré went away, and no one knows what ails him. Ma foi, Mimi! when I last saw him there was a look on his face I did not like to see there."

"But I also do not like the look on the face of Martin Lelièvre," said Mimi.

"But this was such a strange look. It was the

look, I tell thee, of a man possessed by Satan, or of a madman. I must see him, or what account can I render to Désiré?"

He went out, but he came back almost directly.

"Mimi," he said hurriedly, "thou wast always wiser than I am; thou must help me now. Martin must be mad; his door is locked. I looked through the window; he is not in the cottage, but there is a disorder in the room that only a madman could create." And he described to her the wild chaos he had perceived through the window.

Mimi shook her head.

"Perhaps Désiré will come home, Jacques; it seems to me we can only watch for Martin, and when he does come we must make sure that he has no knife or weapon within his reach."

So the brother and sister sat talking and waiting till the moon rose and glittered over the broad sea.

CHAPTER X.

At the Calvaire of Saint Pierre.

OUT of the house—mechanically taking his way along the street—blind, senseless to external things, Désiré hurried on till he found himself some distance from the town, free from all observing eyes, at the outskirts of the table-land high above St. Pierre.

Alone there, with the free air blowing round him on all sides, he was released from the strong power that had hitherto impelled him, and he fell face downwards on the earth.

He wrestled strongly with his agony! It seemed to have almost wrenched out his manhood with his love, for burning drops forced themselves from his eyes, not tears, falling easily and relieving the overcharged heart that sends them, but single drops, scorching the eyes that shed them, as memory, awakened from the paralyzing effect of Marie's

averted face, stabbed deeper each word she had uttered.

He made no moan, no outward sound of the utter despair that was mastering him.

Why is it that natures like Désiré's, tender, true, and brave, are so often those in which reverence for women is early destroyed by some such blight as this—a blight which eats into the bud of their future life, jaundicing its fair young leaves with the spirit of scorn and mistrust, with thorough unbelief in that Paradise of happiness which a true wife can make of a man's life?

While he lay there the sun was setting in broad belts of gold and crimson over the distant city stretched out below—the crimson fast changing into purple lines that mingled with the long range of grey hills in the horizon. Golden light still gathered on the river, winding among the poplar fringed fields of the middle distance, and on the vanes of some of the churches of the city, guiding the eye from the superb burial-place of William the Conqueror to that of his queen, Matilda, at the opposite extremity of the town. But each moment

was dimming the light in the West, and as the sun sank slowly and reluctantly into the grey bank of clouds behind St. Roque, he seemed reflected on the rosy face of the rising moon, aflame with her harvest glories.

Faintly at that distance came up from the city the chorus of bells, sounding the Angelus, swelling louder and louder as each church in turn lent voice to the universal clangour that told the death-hour of another day.

When Désiré rose up at last and looked around him, all the crimson glory had vanished; but for the bright moonlight, he would have been in darkness.

He stood still, awakened to the future. Where should he go now? He could not return to Le Callac. Home! He dared not go there. Was he in a humour to bear his father's cutting jests with patience? And yet the fisherman was often away from the village; he might be absent now. There was no place where Désiré could so completely hide from human fellowship, whether irritant or sympathizing. Yes, he would go to Augé.

Désiré had till now never lost a friend. He had seen mixed good and evil in human nature, but the ripe side of the peach had been always his. Marie was his first disillusion in a reality he had believed in as firmly as an article of religious faith; and he found himself now utterly sceptical of any good, any truth, to be found in woman or man either.

He shrank from looking on a human face.

Since he had risen from the earth, he had been moving slowly towards the high road. The white posts beside it, along which ran the telegraph wires recently placed there, looked ghastly in the moonlight, and as Désiré approached them, a strain of apparently unearthly music sounded close beside him. He started and recoiled a few steps, a strange thrill ran through his blood; but as the music swelled again, and again died away, he smiled at himself. It was only the wind rising at fitful intervals, which had struck those mournful notes from the wires as it swept across them.

About thirty yards before him the ground rose steeply on the left-hand side of the way. On its summit was a large square flight of stone steps,

crowned by a tall Calvary, a well-known landmark on his homeward road.

The moonlight seemed concentrated on this spot, and as he got nearer Désiré saw a figure in the road just below, pausing apparently in contemplation of the Holy Image sculptured on the Cross, but not in devout contemplation, for the man had not removed his hat, or bent his knee, or given any of the other tokens of reverence usual in passing such a symbol.

Désiré crossed himself, and muttering that it was unlucky to meet a heretic, he looked up to the figure on the Cross, as if for protection from the evil presence.

The face looked so calm, so beautiful in the moonlight, that he stood there gazing, and as he stood his own sorrows seemed lightened, his heart felt less hard, less bitter against his fellow-men, brought thus face to face with that unspeakable Sorrow and Love.

The man in the road had his back towards Désiré; he had not turned at his approach, although

the young soldier was within a few yards of him, and though all was now so breathlessly still.

Suddenly there swept by the same unearthly music that had startled Désiré.

Shrieking, almost howling, with mortal fear, the man fled up the steps of the Calvary, and flung himself at the foot of the Cross, clasping it in his arms as if for protection.

With an instinct he could not have accounted for, Désiré sprang after him. He saw that it was his father.

He shrank back surprised.

“Oh, blessed Saviour, have mercy on me; Son of Mary, pity! I did not mean to cause her death. Hark! hark! she is calling me. Oh, holy Virgin, I meant but to stupefy, not to kill; the blow was heavier than I thought! There!—there again! Oh—oh!” The wretched man shrieked out these ravings and strove, by pressing his head against the wood of the Cross, to shut out the thrilling sounds which rose louder and louder as the breeze swept by.

Désiré, dumb with horror, in the hope of quieting him, laid his hand gently on his father's

shoulder; but the touch only increased Martin's frenzy.

"Ah, Céline! Céline!" he shrieked, "let me go. I have confessed! am I not here confessing? Thou hast no right to follow me with thy pale face, for ever threatening that our son shall know who caused thy death."

In the intensity of his horror, of his resolve to learn the very worst, Désiré's touch had become a powerful grasp on the old man's shoulder, and at the instant the breeze swept by again, bearing with it the same mournful strain.

Martin Lelièvre's fear made him desperate. He turned, and strove to wrest himself from what he believed to be his wife's grasp. For an instant, as the moonlight fell on Désiré's face, the likeness to his mother increased the frenzied creature's conviction, and he struggled like some wild animal in the grasp of his foes.

In vain. His son held him with the double strength of a powerful frame and a determined will, and finally Martin reeled back against the Cross, shuddering, panting as if ague-smitten.

As he looked full in Désiré's face he recognized him; probably the physical consciousness that he was struggling with flesh and blood, and not with an avenging spirit, helped to clear Martin's faculties from the nightmare that had numbed them.

His muscles relaxed, the rigid distension of his eyes lessened, and he drew a long gasping breath either of exhaustion or from relief.

Father and son seemed alike unwilling to break the awful silence that followed. The old man leaned against the Cross, still as the sculptured image above him; his son also stood motionless, while the broad moonlight shone down upon them.

Désiré was literally unable to speak, so fearful was the conflict that raged within him; and Martin was trying to collect his thoughts, trying to remember how far he had revealed his secret.

At length he rose up from his reclining attitude against the Cross, shook himself, as a man does after sleeping soundly, and moved forward to descend the steps.

Then Désiré roused, and laid his hand once

more on his father's shoulder. The touch brought back the aguish shuddering.

"Stay"—he could not utter the word "father"—"I must tell you that I have heard enough to know that—that my mother died by your hand."

All Martin Lelièvre's bullying spirit had fled. He was deadened, as if by paralysis or intoxication. His eyes still fastened on his son, but they were expressionless of remorse or fear.

The horror that had seized on Désiré grew with each moment of silence; some of it was at himself, and the intense longing he felt to give the criminal up to justice.

It seemed to him at last, as the awful silence continued, that he could no longer resist the impulse that bade him at once take his father a prisoner to St. Roque.

Did Martin read his purpose in his face? On a sudden the dilated eyes, so rigid in their immobility, quivered, and then turned upon his son an imploring gaze which the clasped hands and bended knees helped to interpret before words came. Down,

lower, still lower, he crouched, till his head almost touched the earth.

The action brought back filial feeling. The unhappy young man shuddered to see his father in so unworthy a position, prostrate before his own child.

He stooped to raise the old man, and throwing back his head as the inert weight strained on his muscles, once more the loving pity of the Face above him helped Désiré.

He placed Martin as he had before stood, against the Cross; but there was no longer the same erect attitude. The fisherman's head drooped between his shoulders, his knees bent inwards, his aspect was more that of a stuffed figure, whose unbalanced weight must after a while cause its own downfall, than that of a man with thews and sinews and self-sustaining power. Martin's lips moved, had been moving for some seconds past, but no words came.

"Shall I help you home? you can tell me the rest—what I ought to know—there."

Désiré spoke calmly, not sternly, as if he were

addressing a stranger to whom he felt bound to render some painful duty.

A quick movement thrilled through Martin Lelièvre; it might have been his son's words that caused the blood to flow more freely. He raised his head, his body became erect, and he stretched his outspread right hand towards Désiré, as if to enchain attention to his words.

"Home, no! What thou hast to know must be told thee here. There is something here that forces me to speak, afterwards no human power could draw from my lips what only she"—the trembling returned visibly—"has made me tell. And she has broken faith too"—his voice grew eager. "When she first got back her senses, and told me she was dying, I said—for it seemed to me then that I could not bear to lose her—I would go to the maire and confess that I struck her——"

"Did you know who it was you struck?" The words came almost involuntarily, startling Désiré more than the narrator, whose eagerness they scarcely slackened.

“Yes; it was not dark—white, white moonlight, as it is now. I had gone down first to see my treasure, and because I knew that—that there was a chance of putting more to it, I went on along the shore. She must have watched me, and followed me, for I walked miles beyond Auge to where the terrible rocks begin—you know them.” He jerked his head in a westerly direction. “I had found what I expected to find, and I had bent over him to see if his clothes were worth having too, when I felt a grasp on my arm. I turned round. I was afraid, for I expected to see nothing human. I thought it was one of the polyps, and their clutch never loosens till they have dragged their prey down into deep water, and I had laid down my knife beyond my reach. I turned, I tell thee, and it was thy mother. I was very angry with her for giving me such a fright, but she raised her other hand, and said I had murdered the sailor lying at our feet. I don’t know what I said. I was mad to hear her say that all my treasure was blood-stained, and would bring a curse. I had never said I had treasure, so I knew she must have followed me. In

my fury I struck her. In a moment she lay before me as lifeless as the sailor!"

Désiré's blood had seemed to stand still while he listened; but now he drew back with abhorrence in face and gesture.

His father saw it, and his courage rose with despair.

"Thou thinkest I murdered her, Désiré; but remember, if she had not come spying upon me with false charges it would not have happened; and remember, too, that if thou hadst left me in peace to-night and that other night not long ago, thou mightest have died without knowing this. That time thou foundest me in the river-bed brought it all back, and brought her too. She has never left me since; to-night I was on my way to obey her. But she has broken faith; she has said our son must never know it, and yet this is her doing. She only said, 'Confess, atone!—confess, atone!'—and I was on my way to atone." He began to walk rapidly up and down the platform, muttering to himself, his son keeping close to him. Presently he stopped. "Yes, Désiré, I said to myself, 'Her spirit will not

rest till I have done one good deed to wipe out the past;' and then, as if by a miracle, I heard of the wrong intended to thee, and I resolved to right thee. I swore before Heaven that if Marie Triquet weds Auguste Leroux, she shall wed a poorer man than thou art; it is he that shall suffer; and I said, 'Mon Dieu! what do I know? So great an atonement made to her son whom she loved may quiet her as much as the confession, and she may rest without that,' I cannot make it, Désiré—I will not, though she stands at my bedside all these nights, since thou stolest upon me at the rocks—looking so like her; and she says, 'Confess, atone?' she threatens with her fingers!" His face grew ghastly as he spoke, and he again stretched out both hands to enforce attention.

"Last night, Désiré, I promised her I would do it. I am on my way to Ardaine; before now thy wrong would have been atoned. As I came up to the Calvaire I only heard 'Confess, confess!' I thought this was fancy; deeds must be better than words, and I hardened myself and tried to pass on to Ardaine, and then her voice shrieked out, as it

had never done before, 'Confess! confess! confess!'"

The aguish trembling overmastered him once more, and if Désiré had not held him up he must have fallen.

The son's senses were reeling with this combination of undreamed-of horror, but Martin's present project seemed to demand his instant interference.

"You have mistaken my mother's wishes entirely," he said. "To my mind, she bade you go to the priest and make the atonement he should counsel, with your treasure. As to your molesting Auguste Leroux, that would be only adding crime to crime." He stopped, hardly able to make his meaning clear; presently he went on, "If you do not promise me to renounce any attempt to injure him, I must at once take you before Monsieur le Maire."

He meant this only as a precautionary means to prevent the darkly threatened mischief at Ardaine, but his father misunderstood him.

"Thou art still my son, Désiré, and I will spare

thee the remorse of disobeying thy mother's last wish—that the secret should be kept. Hush!——” for his son no longer held him, but stood clasping his hands in earnest deprecation of the surmise just uttered. “I will render it impossible to thee to betray me to justice; thou couldst not be so ungrateful when I shall have made Marie again thine. Désiré, I am thy father. I forbid thee to follow me!” At the last word he turned, and then darted down the steps on the side nearest to Ardaine.

CHAPTER XI.

On the Roof of the Abbaye.

THE Calvaire stood at an angle where two roads, each starting from St. Roque, converged into the highway. About twenty yards down the left-hand path (Désiré had come by that on the right, and still stood on that side of the Calvaire) was a narrow cross-road, with a high wall on each side, built of huge blocks of stone.

This walled road, which led to the open country, was a much nearer way to Ardaine than as if you followed the downward path from the Calvaire into St. Roque, and thence mounted again through the Rue Notre Dame; and yet the latter was the ordinary route, for so much of the cross-road as lay between the high walls was deeply shadowed by them, and so ill-drained, as to be, except in the driest weather, a sort of morass—even at the best it was rough and ridgy walking.

But Désiré knew, by instinct rather than from

reflection—he gave himself no time for this—that his father would be found in the walled road, and that if he would stop him he had no time to lose.

For a moment or two surprise held him motionless, and by the time he reached the foot of the platform Martin Lelièvre had vanished.

Désiré ran on at his utmost speed till the increased darkness on the other side showed him that he was approaching the walled road. As if to aid the fugitive, the bank of clouds behind which the sun had set had gradually overspread the sky, and just now a fresh gust of wind drove a mass of ragged black vapour over the moon, totally obscuring her light.

Désiré stopped and listened—it was impossible to see any object in such darkness—but, from the roughness of the ground, he felt sure no one could hasten over it noiselessly.

Yes; there was the faint sound of one running fast in front of him, more ahead than he could have thought possible.

It was a relief to fix his thoughts on the best

means of intercepting his father's purpose, so as not to remember all he had been listening to.

He thought he could soon run down the fugitive; but in the darkness, supposing Martin doubled, it might be difficult to capture him without a desperate struggle.

Would it be better to trust to his own speed, return direct to St. Roque, and thence hasten to Ardaine, and meet his father on his arrival there?

"No," he said. "It must be nearly eleven o'clock. Leroux and all at the farm are sleeping long ago. My father would have concealed himself among the buildings before I could arrive and give the alarm."

And Désiré felt that he could not set the farm-servants on to track out his father's hiding-place. It was plain that the only course left for him was to pursue and overtake the fugitive so as to prevent him from reaching Ardaine.

He had recommenced his pursuit while he decided, for the sounds in front had grown less distinct. Suddenly the darkness lightened, the air came freer, and Désiré knew that he had reached

the end of the wall boundary. Henceforth the pursuit lay between wide stretching fields, with hedges on either side.

On he sped. The sounds in front of him grew more and more distinct as the distance lessened. Suddenly they ceased. Désiré redoubled his speed. He could hear the struggling, gasping breath, as of one almost overcome; and he sprang forward.

There came a scramble, so close beside him that he seemed to feel the hedge move, and then a fall into the field on the other side.

He remembered that there was a long narrow path somewhere hereabouts, which struck diagonally across the intervening fields, and led straight to Ardaine.

Without hesitating, he forced his way through the hedge, and then listened. There was no light to show him how to strike the path.

He heard no one running before him; but there was grass beneath his feet. It was possible the sound might be deadened.

Désiré looked towards the moon, or rather to where she had been before the great black rolling

mass of cloud had swallowed up her light. There was a greyer hue on one side of it than on the other. The next breeze that sprang up would drift the vapour onward, and then he should be able to see the way his father was taking. He could not feel or see any path; but he believed that he must be running on towards Ardaine.

Sooner than he hoped the clouds passed on; the moon shone out again, almost brighter than before. Where was the path? Not in front of him. There it lay to the right. The direction he was following would have brought him out somewhere on the Bayeux road, between La Maladrerie and St. Roque, far away from Ardaine.

In a moment he had regained the footpath, and he looked forward. The ruined Abbaye stood out dark and massive in the wide landscape, surrounded—except where the huge entrance-gates came—by high walls, built of the stone of the country, decaying slowly and imperceptibly beneath the moonlight.

Désiré strained his eyes in vain; there was nothing moving between him and the Abbaye.

His father's manœuvre flashed upon him. Martin had forced his way through the hedge, but had gone no farther; and while his son had been losing himself in the darkness, he had returned to the road, and had been making sure progress towards the farm.

Muttering against his own folly, Désiré at once directed his course towards the road, in the hope of being yet in time.

It was as he had feared.

Martin Lelièvre had scrambled over the hedge, and had dropped under it for the rest he so greatly needed; and when Désiré darted off to find the path across the fields he almost brushed by his father, who lay prostrate on the grass, holding in his panting breath for fear of discovery.

He had been a better runner in his day than Désiré, and was still, except in sustaining power, fully his match. His spirits rose with the success of his stratagem. He should accomplish his purpose, and make his son happy and eternally grateful to himself. Then, surely, Céline would rest. He

regained the road, his mind growing wilder and more ungoverned as he hurried on.

He was within a few yards of the avenue leading to the Abbaye gates. In Martin's present haste it seemed to him that these gates would be easier to scale than the walls. He was dashing down the avenue when he heard steps following in full pursuit along the road he had just left.

In an instant he had hidden himself behind one of the large tree-trunks.

His pursuer stopped, evidently at fault; he came nearly up to the tree behind which the fisherman stood, and then retraced his steps to the road.

Again a mass of whirling black vapour overspread the moon. Martin stooped and gently pulled off his shoes, glided noiselessly along within the shelter of the tree-trunks till he reached the gates, without attracting his pursuer's attention.

He stood still, looking at them. The gates were stout and strong, but not very high; a much bulkier man than Martin would have found space enough to make his way between them and the arched stonework above.

"There is no time for the Abbaye," he murmured; "I must see to Leroux first; and, after all, it is the surest way."

On the other side of the gateway was a large court-yard; in this on the left stood the noble Abbaye, now a mere shell, but in perfect external preservation, even to the roof and the richly-carved tracery of the windows.

It had long been deserted as a church, and was filled with carts, hay, straw, and winter fodder of all kinds; on the right of the court-yard were barns, and close under the wall, that extended for some distance to the left of the gates, facing the Abbaye, was a range of buildings. These were rooms intended for the occupation of the farmer who rented the land when the proprietor himself lived in the farm-house; but the present owner was an absentee, and Auguste Leroux was fitting up a comfortable home for Marie in the old house which stood on the opposite side of the court-yard.

Till his marriage, Monsieur Leroux slept in one of the rooms beside the gate. It was only one story high, a large lofty chamber, which served for

eating and sleeping; the floor was tiled, the walls of bare stone, and on the great open fireplace rested a pair of huge dogs, idle at this time of year. In one corner of the bare gaunt place stood a tall white-faced clock; in another a walnut-wood armoire; in front of the fireplace was a small round table and a chair; and in the farthest corner from the door and window, both close together, and both opening directly from the court-yard, was a mahogany French bed, its scarlet curtains screening the sight, but not deadening the sounds, of the heavy sleeper within.

The tall clock with the white face always ticked loudly, but for the last five minutes it had seemed noisier than ever. It struck eleven; and as the last clear ringing stroke fell on the bell Auguste Leroux started, broad awake.

Was it only the clock that had roused him? Who can say what caused the sudden awakening? It saved his life.

Close beside him, bending down so that he could not see his face, a man was holding a lighted match to the bed-clothes, while the moonlight

streaming in through the open window showed how he had obtained entrance.

Leroux sprang upon the intruder and grappled with him; but in an instant a knife flashed before his eyes. He shouted aloud for help, and struggled desperately with his assailant, but he could not extinguish the flame, now spreading fast from the bed-clothes to the pailleasse beneath. Leroux was powerfully made, but he was a heavy lumbering man, and was besides taken by surprise. His assailant was evidently trying to force him back on to the burning bed.

There was a sudden darkening of the window, a cry of "Au secours!" Leroux felt his adversary's grasp loosen as he turned round to face the new comer. The next instant he was released, and the incendiary had darted through the window.

The person who had last entered was following the intruder, but Leroux called out loudly for help in extinguishing the flames. The heavy cloth bed-curtains only smouldered as yet, but the wood of the bedstead was beginning to take fire. There was not any water in the room, but the horse-trough

stood just outside the window, and there was a duck-pond at the other end of the court-yard.

By the time they had got pails from the nearest barn, and had partially extinguished the flames, the sleepy farm-servants began to arrive, full of wonder and ejaculations of horror at what had occurred.

"Yes, you lazy vauriens, but for that good friend's help I might have been murdered; and if the walls had not been stone," Leroux added, looking round the great bare room as he hastily scrambled on some clothing, "the farm and the Abbaye would have perished."

"Pardon, monsieur," said one of the servants, "but it is partly monsieur's own fault. You made me take Bruno to Varentan yesterday, because you said his noise disturbed you when the moon was full; his tongue would have waked us. Who has done this mischief, monsieur, and where is he?"

One of the elder men said this, but Leroux did not heed him. He had turned to thank his deliverer, and, by the light which some of the servants had by this time brought, he recognized Désiré Lelièvre.

A confused murmur of voices, asking what was

to be done, was seemingly unheard by the two rivals brought so strangely face to face. If Désiré heard, he was purposely deaf; all he hoped for now was his father's escape, for he felt convinced that his own sudden appearance would ensure Martin's departure from the Abbaye.

Leroux was strangely excited: he waved his hands impatiently to the men.

"Go, go now, all of you! You have done what is necessary," and almost pushing the last man out, he shut the door upon him.

Then he turned to Désiré.

"How you came, as if by a miracle, I cannot guess; but you must be a true soldier," he said, in an agitated voice, "to listen only to the call of honour, even to save the life of one who has robbed you of your promised wife. But, Désiré Lelièvre, till two days ago I did not know that your marriage with Marie Triquet had been a decided affair. I was told you admired her; but that was all. I was angry when I heard the truth, for I think a girl even should never break her word, but I said nothing. I thought perhaps Marie's mother knew you

were not worthy of her daughter, and so had discarded you. Now I know differently, and I tell you that I cannot live happily with Marie, feeling that I have stolen her from the man who saved my life. Take her, my friend, take her back again, and my debt will be paid."

It was wonderful to see how the enthusiastic impulses of his gratitude carried the usually pompous, purse-proud Leroux out of himself. Perhaps a little of his accustomed manner clung to him, for he seemed rather to be bestowing Marie on Lelièvre than to be yielding her; but Désiré did not heed this.

He shook his head. For a moment he stood thinking, uncertain, not of what he should say, but how to bring the words out with as little offence as possible to the young farmer.

"I am glad I have been of service to you, Leroux; but I want no reward. I shall not soon forget your generous offer, and I am glad you have made it; it shows me she will have a better husband than I thought; but even if she were willing,

I could not marry now; that is all past and gone for me."

He had restrained himself with great effort during this speech. Leroux's generosity had fired him. It seemed unmanly to say that he thought a woman who could deceive as Marie had never could fill his heart again; it might injure her with her future husband.

Leroux grasped his hand.

"Lelièvre," he began; but there came a clamorous outcry for "Le maître!" "Le patron!" "Monsieur Leroux!" "Au secours! au secours!" from the men who still lingered in the yard.

Désiré reached them first; a nameless fear was spurring at his heart as if to force it out of his body.

As he reached the loud-talking, gesticulating group, clustered at the foot of a tall ladder, which nearly touched the roof of the Abbaye, there was a cry from among them, a sudden scattering, the tall ladder was pushed violently forward against the stone wall facing the side of the Abbaye, and came crashing to the ground.

One of the men ran up to it, and then he pointed upwards, "Le scélérat! The ladder is broken!" he said to Désiré, "and he will set fire to the Abbaye before we reach him."

"He!" Désiré's eyes had been strained on to the roof of the building; but there was no moonlight now, and he could not distinguish as well as the men who had been watching in the darkness.

Just then Leroux touched him.

"The fellow is there," he said—he pointed to the roof. "He pushed the ladder down just now. He is hiding behind the little staircase-tower. You see those towers at the four corners; they each contain a staircase winding up to a gallery which runs along inside the roof from end to end on a level with the upper windows. If any one had the boldness to climb on to the roof from one of those windows this madman might be secured till we have spliced the ladder; if not, he will enter by one of them, and fire the stores, and then—mon Dieu!—I am a ruined man. See! see! there he goes!"

The farmer spoke the last words almost in a shriek. A dark object was plainly seen crawling along the edge of the sloping roof, only saved from falling by a low pierced parapet.

Leroux rushed to the foot of the turret, and unlocked the little door leading to the staircase.

"A hundred francs to the man who goes up first!" he said vehemently.

There was no response. The farm-labourers clustered sulkily together; the reward seemed to them quite disproportioned to the risk proposed. The staircases were said to be broken and dangerous; and then, a probable struggle with a desperate man on a roof more than a hundred feet from the ground! Bah! it was too great a danger.

Leroux looked despairingly at Désiré.

"I would venture myself," he said. "It is not want of pluck that keeps me back; but I am heavy built, and from a child I have the vertigo if I mount a height. If I go I shall lose life as well as fortune."

Désiré's eyes had been strained on the dark, moving form.

"I cannot go," he said, turning away; "you must not ask me——"

Leroux was strangely surprised. Could this man, whom he had seen so daring a short while ago, be a coward after all?

But there was the dark figure making slow but sure progress. It had paused, and apparently had felt over the edge of the parapet for the projecting moulding which would indicate the head of one of the windows.

Leroux raised his voice so as to silence the clamorous cries and threats which the men again shouted upwards.

"Five hundred francs to the man who climbs into the gallery and holds the thief there as he enters! You'll not catch him on the roof now: he is feeling for the window; he will get in there and reach the gallery!—he means to fire the building."

"And if I do catch him on the roof will you make it six hundred?" said a tall gypsy-looking youth, who had come into the yard after the rest.

"Yes! But, in heaven's name, make haste; he has found the window!"

Leroux's words were accompanied by a laugh that came from the roof of the Abbaye, a mocking laugh, that sounded wild and unearthly to the rest, but which Désiré knew too well.

Some of the men below had by this time lit torches, which threw a smoky light upwards. The rest were helping their master to splice the ladder; but it was so badly fractured that this was not easy. Désiré Lelièvre alone stood statue-like, his eyes fascinated as if by a spell on the moving figure, which now, having at last made sure of the window-moulding, sat astride the parapet, stretching one hand downward to grasp the carved tracery. Martin's movements had been much more rapid since Leroux had last spoken. Désiré wondered that the men (for several, tempted by the increased reward, had followed the gypsy) did not appear at the window. He did not know how difficult the broken, winding turret staircase was to climb.

Ah! the outstretched hand has found the tracery

now. In another instant the whole body will be over the parapet.

Désiré can no longer restrain himself. Hitherto his terror has been lest his father should be recognized, but now he calls out loudly:

“Father! father! stay, I will bring the ladder; no one shall harm thee!”

There is no answer; the body swings over the parapet, while both hands cling to the tracery; then they slide quickly to the central mullion, the whole weight of the body dragging from them.

Désiré stands in speechless horror. He sees the clinging figure twice strive to force its way through one of the unglazed lights, and twice swing out in rebound from the violent effort: the aperture is too small. The figure shakes now as if agitated, and a loud cry from within tells that the men have reached the window.

“Stay!” Désiré shouts from below—“hold off! don’t touch him! he is mad! I will climb the ladder and hold him fast; he will yield to me!” He adds this, hoping to restrain and calm his father.

He looks round for the ladder. No one heeds his words: all are too busy in securing their work. They have repaired the ladder at last by means of a shorter one spliced over the fracture, and are raising it from the ground.

When Désiré turned his eyes for the first time from their fixed gaze on the dark figure hanging in mid-air, it made one more desperate effort to enter by the window; and then, as if struck by sudden paralysis, lost its hold and fell, striking with a dull sickening sound on the stones below.

CHAPTER XII.

What became of Désiré.

WHEN Désiré recovered consciousness he did not know where he was.

He lay on a bed something like his own, but he was not in his father's house. Even before memory came back he recognized this with a feeling of relief. Just then the door opened, and he saw Mimi.

She came up to the bedside and asked him quietly how he was; then she gave him the soup she had brought in, as if it were the most natural thing possible for him to be lying there.

Désiré lay still—he felt too weak to move or talk. Presently Mimi said,

“Jacques will be so glad you are better. I will fetch him.”

She went away, and when she had told Jacques he must be very quiet and careful, she left him alone with Désiré.

Jacques fidgeted: he was not used to a sick-room, and he heartily wished Mimi had stayed and watched over his behaviour; besides, he was afraid of Désiré's questions.

"Ma foi!" he said at last, "I never thought to see thee reasonable again, mon garçon. And the farmer there, Leroux, he will be as glad as glad can be!"

Désiré smiled.

"I have had a fever, then?" he asked faintly.

"A fever! I should say thou hast had three fevers at once, if that is possible. Monsieur Leroux, he says it was the burning thou hast received in saving his life. He says he shall never forget his fright when he saw thee fall in a heap in the court-yard, and then—for he is a good fellow at bottom, Leroux—he was raising thee in his arms to lay thee in his own chamber—not on his bed, that was too wet from the water that had been thrown on it; and while he waited, giving orders for some fresh bed to be made there, all of a sudden he felt a struggle, and, pouf! there thou wast, flying for thy life through the gates which had been opened to let in

some of the men who slept outside. Ah, Désiré! it was well for thee that night that I was watching. I hear someone come flying along the sands as if Satan was at his heels, and suddenly thou stumblest over a rock, and I see thee as I think dead on the sand."

Mimi opened the door gently.

"Be careful; thou talkest too much, Jacques," she said, smiling.

"Ma foi!"—Jacques plunged his great rough hand into his hair—"Then, Mimi, stay here and mount guard, as thou hast done so long. I am only telling him how his illness began. I have not said a word of his cries, and his struggles, and his wild talk, and of all thy skilful nursing. Ma foi, mon gars! I could not have brought thee round without Mimi. I will say that for her, though"—he looked slyly at her—"she does lead me such a dog's life about talking above my breath. Why, ma foi, I have had to whisper till my throat aches!"

Mimi's face had grown crimson; Désiré wondered, as he looked gratefully at her, why he had never thought her pretty before.

He put out his wasted hand.

"I don't know how to thank you for your goodness," he said, and tears came to his eyes as he pressed the girl's hand. "And thou, too, my friend; how much anxiety I have caused thee——"

"Thou must not talk," said Jacques Fayel, delighted to stop his friend's thanks; "to-morrow I will have thee out on the sands; next day—who knows?—out at sea, fishing perhaps; now go to sleep, *mon gars*——no, thou shalt not speak even to Mimi!"

For Mimi was weeping, and Jacques, utterly mystified at such inconsistent behaviour, took her hand, and led her into the outer room.

"*Sapristi!*" he said roughly, when he had shut the door behind them, "if I had found thee crying when this poor fellow lay there raving about murders and the Calvaire, I would not have wondered; but to cry now, just when he is so much better that I could turn head over heels with joy, is the behaviour of a child, Mimi! Bah! bah! dry thy tears then!"

Captain de Gragnac was again sitting in the

window overlooking the court-yard of the old Convent de l'Oratoire, and, no longer standing before him, but seated in a chair close by, with thin pale face and sunken eyes, was Désiré Lelièvre.

It was the first time he had felt able to make the journey to St. Roque, and he was almost overpowered by fatigue.

There had been much during the last two days to try his newly-found strength. He could not be sure whether Jacques Fayel suspected the identity of his father with the madman who had met with such a fearful fate at the Abbaye d'Ardaine; but it was plain that no one else did. It was supposed in Auge that Martin had gone on one of his long solitary expeditions among the dangerous rocks of Calvados, and had perished there, far beyond human help.

The body of the madman who had fallen from the roof of the Abbaye had been crushed out of all human likeness; and, as death had supervened while in the act of crime, the remains had been hastily buried without any religious rites.

From his father's confession, it was clear to

Désiré that he had been one of the unknown wreckers among the fishermen, and he felt almost sure that the burden which Martin had borne into the cottage the last night he had himself passed there, was this ill-gotten treasure.

Yesterday Désiré had visited the cottage. He shuddered as he stepped over the threshold.

In the inner room, hidden away among the straw stuffing of his father's paillasse, he found money, watches, and valuable jewellery, and, among other articles, a massive altar service, evidently taken from a wreck. Désiré trembled at the thought of how all this had been come by, but he kept the fisherman's secret.

The whole of the treasure was religiously consigned to the curé of St. Julien to be spent in masses for the souls of his unhappy parents, one of whom, Désiré simply said, had been a grievous sinner.

And then it seemed to the young soldier that he must put the sea between himself and Auge. The remembrance of that terrible night was still too vivid: only time and absence could soften its

horror. And he resolved to consult his captain about his future life.

From Monsieur de Gragnac he heard that the 75th was ordered to Algeria, and the Captain at once proposed that, until Désiré should be able to take his place in the ranks, he should act as his servant, and thus get the benefit of thorough change of scene.

"And so, my poor fellow," he said kindly, "you think you will be strong enough to travel at the end of the week. Bon! I hear this Algerian climate works wonders with invalids." And Monsieur de Gragnac, who had heard the end of Désiré's courtship, could not resist the opportunity, as he smoked his cigar, of illustrating his favourite theory.

"Liking, my poor Désiré, is permitted, is, in fact, desirable; but love, in what is to be an indissoluble tie, merely clouds and blinds the judgment with its passionate fumes. When next you think of marrying some girl who has filled your heart and your head to the exclusion of everything else, you will remember this misadventure and my counsel,

and you will then decide to accept all the love that comes in your way—but you will also tell yourself that a French soldier should have nothing to do with so serious an institution as marriage—until he is at least forty-five.”

“I thank you from my heart for all your goodness to me, monsieur; but I can never think either of love or of marriage henceforward. I am not the man to be deceived twice, and I have not so bad an opinion of the girl I loved as I can never love again, as to suppose her worse than other women are. Their natures are weaker than ours, and their feelings also, I suppose.” And yet while Désiré spoke he thought of Mimi Fayel, and felt that there might be high unselfish natures in women.

“It is true,” said the Captain. “Remember this well, Désiré, and you will have learned the secret of dealing with women. They have no power of endurance—they give like a cane.”

“Yes, monsieur, I think so. Marie will be happy with Leroux.” He spoke with an effort, for the farmer’s name vividly brought back his father’s awful confession. “I hear they are to be married

at the Saint-Michel. I wish them happiness. For me, monsieur, my mistress is henceforth the French Army, and the Emperor is my father. I have no home but under the eagle's wings."

He bade farewell to the Captain, and found Jacques Fayel waiting for him outside the great gates of the quaint old court-yard. The vine leaves were crimsoning fast, and the fruit hung in purple clusters; yellow festoons of a creeping plant that garlanded the lower windows had grown almost too wildly luxuriant.

"Eh bien, mon gars!" said Jacques, as he took him by the arm, "it is well I brought the charrette close up to the gates—thou art as white as a sand-eel."

The young fisherman tried to cheer his friend on the way home; but Désiré was thinking too deeply to rouse for more than a minute or so.

They were very near home when Jacques stopped the horse.

"Canst thou walk this little bit, my friend? It will save thee some rough jolts."

Désiré jumped down briskly. He was tired of

the monotonous jolting of the rough vehicle, and he was glad to be alone.

Mimi was sitting in her usual place at the open door. He had meant to walk on to the mouth of the river; but, seeing her, he stopped, and then went towards her.

Mimi saw him coming. She had managed hitherto to avoid finding herself alone with Désiré; but now she could not help it. She could not run away without seeming rude.

But she felt angry that she was foolish enough to be growing red and uncomfortable.

"And what for?" she said, indignantly. "For a man who cares no more for me than he does for his own musket. Not so much, perhaps."

"Well, Monsieur Désiré"—she forced herself to look him in the face—"here you are, tired and hungry. I am sure of it. Allons, the soup is au chaud, and I suppose Jacques will be in directly." Here a look she was not used to in Désiré's eyes made her falter. She got up and went into the cottage.

Désiré followed her. "I am not hungry, Mimi,

and I want to speak to you. I have never yet thanked you as I want to thank you for your goodness to me, and now I don't know how to do it." He stopped and looked at her again. Instinctively, almost unconsciously, the slender brown hands had stolen up to her face, and they hid it now from Désiré.

"Mimi," he said, and his voice trembled, "I am going away. I am still ill. I may—who knows?—die in Algeria. Will you wear this while I am away, Mimi, to put you in mind of the poor fellow you were so good to?" He had taken a small medal from round his neck, and he held it towards her; but Mimi could not look at him. "Are you angry with me?" he said sorrowfully.

"Angry!—oh, Désiré!" She looked up at him now, and he thought he had never seen such beautiful eyes as Mimi Fayel's.

"Then we are friends." And he put the little chain that held the medal round her neck, and kissed her on both cheeks in brotherly fashion. But the kisses seemed to awaken fresh ideas.

"It was my mother's," he said. "She always

loved you, Mimi. She had it blessed for me when I was little, and I promised her not to part from it lightly. And now, Mimi, will you not give me a token—something to tell me always I have a true friend left in Augé?”

“I have only this,” she said. She drew a small silver cross from within her dress. “I have another, but I love this best. Will you wear it for me, Désiré?”

It seemed to both of them most inopportune that Jacques should choose this moment for returning, and he was in such a hurry, too, for his supper, that Mimi could not even stop for Désiré’s thanks. But he paid them with interest on the morning of his departure.

“Adieu, Mimi,” he whispered, while Jacques bustled about getting ready a present of fish he was taking to Monsieur de Gragnac. “If I do not take service again I may return to Augé when I choose; and, Mimi”—he looked at her earnestly—“I do not think I shall take service unless there is war.”

"NOTRE JEAN."

...for me when
it was said to me that I had not
yet given you my gift. I have a true
diamond for you.

She drew a small
diamond ring from her dress. "I have another,
and I will wear it for you, Désiré."

NOTRE JEAN.

...moment for return
to his duties, too, for his supper,
and he could not stop for Désiré's thanks
to him on the morning of
his departure.

"Adieu, Mère," he whispered, while Jacques
bustled about getting ready a present of fish he was
taking to Monsieur de Grignon. "If I do not
take service again I may return to Angers when I
am free; and, Mère, I will be with you as soon as
I do not think I shall take service unless there is
war."

"NOTRE JEAN."

I.

"HOLD thy tongue, Jean! wilt thou never be quiet?"

The words were not very hard, but they were so harshly spoken.

I was coming from my room along the open gallery that ran round the courtyard of the Hôtel Sainte Barbe, and I looked down over the old wooden balustrade to see the speaker.

She was tall and thin—would have been called handsome, I suppose—she had one of those flat, well-coloured, bright-eyed, expressionless faces which may serve to hide various feelings, but which certainly only betray one—that of placid self-satisfaction.

Just now this face was in a frowning phase: it was evident the speaker was not satisfied with her little son.

I had only reached the quaint old Norman town of St. Roque on the previous evening, but something in the tone of voice made me recognize Madame Clopin, my landlady at the Hôtel Sainte Barbe.

I suppose it is an unpardonable weakness; but I do not like to hear a woman tell boys to be quiet when they are in the open air, and then I knew Jean's crime was not a serious one. I had heard a clear little treble pipe a few minutes before sounding out—

"La Boulangère a des écus
Qui ne lui coûtent guère,
N'en doutez pas je les ai vus
J'ai vu la Boulangère—j'ai vu," &c.

And then in the midst of the rapid refrain had come this extinguisher—"Hold thy tongue, Jean! wilt thou never be quiet?"

I scarcely knew why, but I felt that a sudden and unaccountable fit of indignation against Madame Clopin had taken hold of me; and as indignation must be fed by pity, I felt an equal amount of sympathy for the little pale Jean.

He was not a pretty child when you saw him nearer, he was so very pale, and he had such dark

circles under his eyes; then he had a wide quivering kind of mouth, and straight soft-looking hair—no, certainly, Jean Clopin was not a pretty child. I dare say it was contradiction—I am very contradictory—it is one of the privileges of single women; you see our married sisters have always their husbands to contradict and snub in private, and this gives them a large power of public gentleness and sweetness; but whatever the cause may have been, I felt my heart go out to poor little large-eyed Jean as I had never felt it stirred for any simply pretty boy. I stood looking at him over the balustrade. His mother sailed on into her den in the entrance passage opposite the salle, but Jean seated himself on the edge of a long stone trough just below the great pump.

The action reminded me of Cinderella. There was a desolate, longing look on the little pale face. I don't think Jean felt inclined to sing the "Boulangère" after his mother left him.

Everything was still and quiet in the old grey court. There was a range of sheds at the end facing the broad covered entrance, and under these

stood a medley of vehicles, chief among them the outlandish, heavy-hooded carriages of the Norman gentry, putting up at the Hôtel Sainte Barbe for a day or so, on their way to St. Luc and Trouville. Under the farthest shed was a goodly array of vegetables—orange-coloured carrots, with lovely feathery tops, equalling a fern in grace and colour; snowy turnips with emerald crowns; and strings of rosy onions, while in wirework baskets, suspended from the beams overhead, were the blanched scarole leaves draining, as the ceaseless drip, drip on the round stones below testified, in readiness for the table-d'hôte salad.

I wanted to make acquaintance with the little pale child. With boys it seems best to let one's overtures take a propitiatory shape, so I went back into my room, which opened on to the gallery by a glass door. Just before I left Southampton Aunt Lotty had crammed a box of acidulated drops into my hand.

"The very best possible preventive against seasickness, my dear," the gentle old lady said. "I have been told if you put one in your mouth when

you get on board, and replace it with another as soon as it has dissolved, and repeat this, dear Jane, until the box is empty, you won't even feel squeamish."

I kissed Aunt Lotty, and thanked her with the affectionate hypocrisy one is sometimes compelled to use; and now for the first time I unsealed its paper wrappings and opened the box.

I went back to the gallery.

My Cinderella was looking more cheerful. He had quitted the trough, and stood watching the chef de cuisine as he pumped into a great brass pan placed just where Jean had been sitting.

The chef's face grew redder and redder as he pumped, and made a yet more vivid contrast against his fresh white costume.

"Well, Jean," he said, "what art thou doing here? Why art thou not out hunting butterflies?"

The depressed look came back to Jean's face. "I have got no net, La Motte."

"Ah, what a pity! Hast thou lost that net which Louison gave thee at the last Saint Jean?"

"No, I have not lost it."

I was not near enough to be certain; but it seemed to me the poor little boy sighed.

"Tiens! Thou hast not lost it, Notre Jean? Where is it, then, my boy?"

"Mamma has taken it until I am more wise, La Motte, and until I shall not cry out so loud for joy when I see three, four, five beautiful butterflies settled on the clover-blossoms. Oh, it is beautiful—it is beautiful!" His face beamed with joy, and he shouted, almost as loud as he had shouted "La Boulangère."

"Chut!" The chef raised his hand warningly, and gave a glance over his shoulder towards the entrance-way. "Out of the road, my lad;" and he raised the brass pan, like a great jewel now, as the water sparkled to the sunshine above, while the bright metal glowed through the pure liquid. He smiled and nodded affectionately to the boy, spite of his admonition; and I felt somehow justified in the fancy I had taken to poor little Jean Clopin.

I do not know that I need justification: troublesome, uncomprehended children seem to have a special claim on one's sympathy. Like the house-

less, starving dogs, they cannot tell their needs. Poor little souls, they don't know what it is they want; they don't know what it is that makes them abrupt, and obtrusive, and troublesome—the very opposite of "pretty behaved." They only know that sometimes, when their little hearts are most full of overflowing love and life, they get a harsh repulse, which plunges them into a slough of doubt and distrust, out of which they scramble at last aimless, only conscious that they don't know how to do better. But if they could tell us what they wanted, they would, after all, be precocious little horrors. The best of them is, that the fount of love in their hearts is usually inexhaustible. Choke it, draw it off, seal it down—it still rises and finds its way to the light.

But while I went on meditating in this sentimental fashion (you see I am, as I said before, a single woman, an "independent lady of a certain age," with nothing to do but to study my own sentiments—I gave up the idea of getting married long ago, for I fancy I should find the restraint of being tied down to a home and a husband simply

intolerable)—well, while I had gone on mentally wandering in this way, Jean had spied me out, and he stood now in the midst of the courtyard, his eyes fixed on me.

"Catch," I said in English, as I threw the sweets; then, feeling very much ashamed of my mistake, I called out the word in French. But Jean had comprehended, and had deftly caught his bonbons. He stood smiling and pulling off his little cap; but he did not begin to eat his sweetmeats.

I thought he was modest, and I went back to my room. After a few minutes, I came again to look for Jean. He was still where I had left him, his eyes fixed on the spot where I had stood, and I beckoned him to come to me. He ran upstairs, came and sat down by me on the sofa, and looked at me with his bright, earnest eyes.

How the child stared at me! I wore long curls then; and at last, looking specially at them, he said, "Madame is English, is she not?"

"Yes," I said, and smiled, for almost as he spoke the poor little fellow reddened; and I remembered a French caricature I had seen and

which he, doubtless, had also seen, of these same long English curls.

Somehow, this broke the ice, and he was soon chattering away, looking as blithe as one of his favourite butterflies.

He had a papa—oh yes; but he was away: he had gone to see grandmamma, who lived in Paris and was so—so ill. And he had sisters; but yes, he had four of them—Idalie, and Marie, and Françoise, and Gabrielle; and a little brother. Ah, but was it possible that madame had not seen his little brother? He was of such beauty and gentleness, that everybody must love him! And already he could laugh—oh yes, he could laugh; and he was Jules. There was a great man, also, who had been named Jules, and his surname was César. Which did madame think sounded best, Jules Clopin, or Jules César?

Here he stopped, and looked up in my face, as if the answer were of importance.

I laughed.

"Well, I think I prefer the last," I said; and then, as he looked downcast, I tried to make the

best of it:—"You see, Jules César is historical; and I like history."

His little face lit up in a moment.

"And I too, madame—I love history; of all my lessons, I like it best. But Idalie and Marie do not love history—they care only for the history of the saints!" Here came a very unmistakable sigh.

"And you like butterflies too, Jean, I think?"

"Oh yes, madame."

"But it is cruel to kill them," I said, for I don't like to see insects tortured; and it is my belief that boys' hearts get hardened prematurely if they are allowed to take the life even of a butterfly in cold blood.

"Madame"—Jean looked very grave at me, and he put his little hand on his heart as if to assure me I might believe him—"I do not kill the butterflies. When I see them, as they come flying all around me, scarlet, and blue, and white, and orange, and my gold and black machaons above all—ah, madame, then I am glad. It seems to me that paradise must be just like those butterflies. I catch them only to see them, that I may enjoy the colours

on their beautiful wings, and then I let them fly; and my net does not hurt them. And I would fly with them if I could—they are so beautiful and happy, the butterflies."

His eyes had grown large and bright; he had risen to his feet as he spoke, trembling all over with his excitement.

I did not understand him, but I felt the presence of a gift in the child. Who knows, thought I, but here is the germ of a great painter or a famous poet? Will it ever develop, or will it be ground down into common humanity by want of sympathy?

I could not understand him—I have said this before—but I drew little Jean to me and kissed him almost reverently.

He put both arms round my neck and whispered, very softly, "I love you."

II.

I WENT down to the salle à manger next morning to breakfast. I wanted to renew my acquaintance with Jean. I thought that perhaps he would like to go with me to the Museum to see the pictures.

The staircase ended on the opposite side of the entrance way, and just as I was crossing this to go into the salle I saw a stout, good-tempered looking *bonne* in the courtyard.

"Louison!" sounded from the kitchen, and she turned back again.

"It was Louison who gave him the net," I thought. "I shall wait here, and then I shall listen to Louison's report of my little favourite."

I went on to the entrance and looked out into the street. A tall, long-moustached *gendarme* was in the very act of bowing profoundly to the chef. There they were, their noses nearly touching, the

cocked silver-laced hat and the paper cap both held in the air. I could not help laughing; and not to seem ill-bred, I went back into the courtyard.

Louison was coming towards me again. "Good day," I said; "where is little Jean?"

"Ah, mademoiselle, do you know our Jean?" Louison had detected my single estate at once, and was far too polite to address me as madame. "It is for him that I go to speak to the mistress. Ah, the poor child, it is every day the same; from morning till evening it is nothing but scolding."

"But how is it that he is so naughty a child? I should have thought him good."

"Naughty, mademoiselle! if we were all as good as our Jean, there would not be room for so many in paradise." Here Louison stopped and wiped her eyes with her blue apron, and then settled her cap-strings with a look at me as if I had ruffled them. She had a hard, brown, Picarde face, with such a row of white teeth as let you see at once that she had not been born in a cider country like Normandy. "Ma foi!"—she shrugged her shoulders and went on talking as fast as she could—"it is past belief that

a little girl who is not bad for others, who is even devout for her age, should bring home tales of her own brother till she takes the joy from his life."

"But who does this?" and I felt that I looked indignant by the sympathy of Louison's bright black eyes.

Louison glanced over her shoulder and tossed back her great solid-looking head with its cockscomb of lace. Seemingly she had adopted the cap of the country in which she now lived.

"I will speak," she said; "let those have the shame who cause the blame. It is Idalie, mademoiselle; she is our eldest, and madame cannot see a fault in her, and she is sent out to take walks with our Jean and with the others to watch over them, for as you perhaps know, mademoiselle, the ways of a boy are not the ways of a girl. Jean sees something which pleases him, he laughs, he dances, he sings, he is a so excitable child when anything gives him pleasure. But, mademoiselle, Idalie is different: she is quiet, discreet, if you will, but she is dull; she cannot understand the pleasure of our Jean in these little things, and she thinks it

is wrong to do anything but to walk along quietly as in a procession. It is hard, but it is perhaps just that madame will not suffer that the child should sing or cry out here in the court; but in the open air what can be the fault? I ask myself, is he always to be kept in such subjection, he who is so bright and so gay when he is beloved? How can he live with such treatment? They do not know what they are doing to him." There were tears in Louison's eyes.

I felt puzzled.

"But has this always been so?" I said.

Louison shook her head. "No, mademoiselle; monsieur and madame have only been here two years. Before then we had a farm in the country, and our Jean was always out-of-doors. He was not ill then, and when he came into the house he was quiet. Now he is never well or strong. It is not so bad when his sisters are at school; but with every holiday it gets worse, and I can do so little for him."

"It is very sad," I said. "Where is he now?"

Louison shook her head angrily. "The poor

child is in the loft. He sang before he said his prayers, and Idalie has said to madame that he will grow indevout if he is not punished."

"Good day," I said. Now that I had heard all I wanted, it seemed to me that I had no right to have questioned Louison—that I had been meddling in other people's business; and yet she spoke of the boy almost as if he were her own. I learned afterwards that he was her foster-child.

I had so counted on our Jean as a companion, that I felt lonely by myself. I went and visited the cathedral—a magnificent semi-Norman pile, with a broad ribbon of golden sunlight striking across it from the clerestory to the pavement. Looking at that golden ribbon—so broad and solid that it seemed too real and hard to be a mere effect of light—I almost felt the old childish belief that if I could only clasp it firmly enough, it would take me straight up to heaven.

"I wonder if Jean thinks so. I must ask him."

Here I found myself blushing. I read in a book once that women do not blush after five-and-thirty. It is not true. I am past that age, and yet I blush

still when I feel ashamed of myself; and now I was ashamed to find that, instead of examining the antiquarian treasures of St. Etienne, I had been thinking of climbing sunbeams just as Jack climbed his bean-stalk. Well, I confess it, I am steady enough in respectable England, but once I get to the other side of the water, I find gaiety catching, and become as childish as if I had shaken off twenty years.

I turned to leave the church after a bit, and met a young woman coming in. She was ragged and dirty, and I recognized her as one of a band of women I had seen employed to sweep the streets the evening before. I had fancied them the very refuse of the population.

I thought she was coming to me for a sou, but she took no notice of me; she went straight to the little altar of the Blessed Virgin, crossed herself, and then knelt down and prayed quietly for about five minutes. Then she got up, crossed herself with bent head as she passed the holy water scallop, and left the church.

I felt a strange inclination to follow the woman

and learn her history; but just then my heart was so full of Jean and his troubles, that I lost the opportunity. If I go back next year to St. Roque, I must try to find out my poor ragged devotee.

When I reached my inn, Madame Clopin and Jean were both at the foot of the staircase. I was so rejoiced to see my little friend that I went forward and kissed him before I spoke to his mother. Of course this was a most undignified proceeding, and I saw, by madame's set eyes and mouth, that she thought so.

"You have a charming family, madame," I said, "but as yet I have only made acquaintance with my little friend," and I patted Jean's soft, straight, brown hair.

"You are very good, mademoiselle, and I hope Jean shows by his conduct that he is grateful for your kindness."

I could have put madame under the pump; only, you see, she is a head taller than I am, so the word "could" must be understood as referring to the capacity of feeling.

"He is a dear little fellow," I said with energy; "I want him to go with me to the Museum."

You should have seen Jean's eyes—they sparkled just as they had done about the butterflies, and he began to jump and snap his fingers.

The corners of madame's eyes and mouth went down as if some one had pulled a string attached to them.

"Jean, stand quiet at once. There was never so ill-bred a child. Bow to madame, and thank her for her goodness." Then she went on in quite another voice to me—a sort of voice that sounded as if it had been rolled, there was such a want of inflection in it—"You are very good, madame, but I fear to trouble you with Jean. He has not yet learned to be discreet, and might cause you embarrassment. When he goes out it is always with his sister Idalie, and sometimes with Idalie and Marie. Pardon me, alone it could not be."

It is impossible to describe the sudden change in my little man's face. Poor little Jean! All the joy that had shone out through his clear grey eyes

was shadowed under this sudden cloud: they now looked light and colourless.

I felt unable to conquer Madame Clopin, but I would at least be even with her, and have my way, even although I had to take hers along with it; so I announced that I would be charmed to conduct the three children to the Museum.

"Jean, you may tell Idalie and Marie."

Jean ran away to fetch his sisters in great excitement, and then Madame Clopin went on—

"Ah, mademoiselle, if I am unhappy in Jean, I have at least one treasure—my Idalie is an angel—she is so good, so exact, so scrupulous, so pious, so watchful over the conduct of her brother, and so anxious to amend him, that she is more than I can speak of." Here, to my surprise—for I was terribly prejudiced against Madame Clopin—a genuine tear sprang into each of the hard brown eyes, and rolled over the wooden cheeks.

I longed just then for the wonderful knack some people have of "saying a word in season"; but though I felt that Madame Clopin was wrong in setting one child against another, I felt still more

strongly that I had better mind my own business, and keep my opinion till it was asked for. You will know by this that I do not like to be interfered with myself, and that my reticence has the attribute of that peculiarly selfish maxim, "Do as you would be done by," just as if one could always judge other people's feelings by one's own!

Well, we went to the Museum.

"Come and walk with me, Jean," said Idalie, "and Marie can go with mademoiselle."

But I told Idalie I wanted her to walk with me, and I sent the two little ones on together. Idalie was, as her people say, "ni bien ni mal"—neither good nor bad—a dull, discreet sort of child. I mentally saw the woman she would grow into—we have plenty of them in England, and I shivered—women who are always right, and therefore, as they can find nothing to amend in themselves, are for ever tinkering their neighbours.

At the Museum Jean came and nestled close up to me. I found him wonderfully intelligent about the pictures. He pointed out to me beauties in them which I should never have discovered for my-

self; and I felt more than ever the presence of a gift in the little, pale, large-eyed child.

"I wonder if his mind is too active for his body?" I thought to myself. "Those dark circles under his eyes don't look healthy." But after we got home I saw him romping and playing with a still younger sister at one of the windows overlooking the gallery, and I dismissed the thought.

I had settled to meet some friends at Le Mans, on their way to Paris; and then we were to spend a few weeks on the banks of the Loire. After that I had to visit my cousins in Brittany, so I could only stay a week longer at the Hôtel Ste. Barbe. I had got to love notre Jean more and more, and I promised the poor little sobbing fellow, when I said good-bye, that I would not go back to England without revisiting St. Roque. He had been with me nearly all day lately, and I had really grown warmly attached to the loving, intelligent child.

Madame was not at home when I started for the station, but Louison came to my room to fetch me when the carriage arrived. Jean flung himself on

my sofa, hiding his face in the cushions, and the old woman signed to me to slip away quietly.

"Good-bye, Louison," I nodded as soon as I was seated in the cab at the inn door. "I will come back again to see our little Jean——"

"You will have to come soon then, mademoiselle," she said, and her face grew so sad that I was alarmed; "the doctor told me yesterday, when he came to see the femme de chambre, that our Jean cannot live long; there is mischief here," she said, and she put her hand on her heart. "Ah, they will all be sorry when it is too late."

I felt stunned by this sudden news; it seemed as if I must go and take another look at our Jean. But my coachman was impatient. If I missed this train my friends would grow uneasy, so I drove off heavy-hearted.

III.

I WAS longer away from St. Roque than I had expected to be. My friends were a pair of enthusiasts, a husband and wife, artists in different ways; and they would not leave unvisited one of the many places of interest which gem the silver Loire, so that it was the end of September before I got to Dinant, late in October before I once more set forth on my way to England. I was resolved not to try the long passage to Southampton again. I would go back by way of Paris; so St. Roque was out of my direct road, but I had promised little Jean, and I could not break my word.

The constant change of scene, the charming conversation of my artist friends, and, after that, the delight I had experienced in my intercourse with the Breton peasantry, the strange mixture of the grotesque and the picturesque to be seen in that part of France, had quieted my fears about the little uncomprehended child. But now, as I found myself

driving through the quaint streets of St. Roque, with their gabled houses, and sculptured dormers and grey old archways, through which, if you took the pains to look, were to be seen lovely tree-shaded gardens, still gay with fuchsias and China roses, and stately with oleanders and stiff courtly hollyhocks—now and then with a tiny fountain in the midst, that seemed as if it laid a trap for sunbeams, and revelled in having caught them—as I drove through all these well-remembered beauties, Louison's parting words came back, and I felt a sudden keen anxiety.

Louison herself was in the courtyard when I arrived, and my first glance at her told me that no one would ever more be anxious for little Jean. She was dressed in black, and I knew how rare a custom this was in women of her class.

"Ah, mademoiselle," she said, "you are welcome; but if you could only have come a week ago."

Then she bustled on before me to my room, the same that I had had on my former visit.

"Come in," I said; but I might have spared my

words. Louison followed me in, closed the door, and then she set her back against it and burst out crying.

I cried too, and for a little while we could not speak to each other.

"Mademoiselle," said Louison, "I cannot help it. He loved you and you loved him, and it is all said."

"But when was it?" I asked.

"Ah, then, you did not know it, and I thought it was for that you came. Only yesterday we laid him in the cemetery. Mademoiselle, did I not tell you they would be sorry? The patron, ah, poor man! he was yet in Paris, for his mother, the old madame, is of a disposition so undetermined that she will neither die nor let it alone; but when our Jean was taken so—so ill, madame sent for monsieur, and he came at once. Ma foi, I should like you to have seen the face of notre Jean when his father came to him. He was on the sofa here, mademoiselle—he loved to be in your room when he could—and his eyes shone with joy. 'Do not cry, papa,' he said, for monsieur took his boy quite up into

his arms, and I saw the tears coming—"I shall be quite well now thou art come. I have wanted thee, my dear papa. When I see thee I do not feel so naughty. Am I very naughty, my good papa?"

"Mademoiselle, you should have seen our Jean's eyes that moment—like a pair of stars looking straight into his father's heart.

"Monsieur did not answer. I do not think he could. Madame had come in and she stood listening, but notre Jean did not see her.

"‘Papa,’ the little voice said—and oh, mademoiselle, I saw the mouth twitch, and I could hardly hear him say—‘Stay with me always, and then I shall be good; there has been an English lady here, and she too made me feel good. Why is it, papa, that I am so naughty to mamma and to Idalie?’

"Madame knelt down and kissed the little hand of our Jean.

"‘Thou art not naughty, my love. Mamma will not think thee naughty any more.’

"Ah, mademoiselle, I think the look in our Jean's eyes just then must have been very hard to bear; for I would not have known madame. She threw her

arms round him, she laid her cheek against his, and she sobbed till monsieur spoke out quite sternly:

"'Margotin, agitation is bad for him—how can you be so selfish? Help me to put him to bed.'

"Then madame got up quite humbly, and went on before monsieur to her own room, and we laid our little Jean there, mademoiselle—but not for long. Sometimes he suffered, and then we heard him praying for patience and constancy; but he did not suffer long, mademoiselle. Two days ago he said to me, 'Adieu, Louison. I am sorry to go from thee, but I am going to a better place, where I shall not make a noise or be naughty any more. I am going to le bon Dieu, Louison. Good-bye.'"

Louison buried her face in her apron, but her last words had stopped my tears. Why should we weep and lament for our little Jean? As well might the caterpillar grieve to see its fellow turn chrysalis. The bright little spirit was at rest—for ever free in the presence of that Perfectness of Beauty it had loved so ardently yet so gropingly here.

THE
STREET-SWEEPER OF ST. ROQUE.

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I.

I REALLY had not decided where to go. London was growing insufferably hot, although its emptiness was in some ways pleasant—you will understand by this that I do not care for parties, and am nervous about street-crossings, and London crossings in May and June are seriously trying to the nerves.

The streets were no longer crowded; but still London in August is like an emptied bee-hive—a bald, uncomfortable desert.

Indecision is apt to call dissatisfaction to keep it company—I observe that long words have a way of running in couples. It was a decided relief to get a letter from my cousin, Jemima Brown. I am very fond of Jemima; she is sixty, short, stout, and sentimental, but her sentiment does not content itself with weeping over modern novels, and the

sorrows of heroines who are no better than they should be, and who, if such impalpable beings could ever have stood upright in the flesh, would certainly have been much worse than their authors represent them to be. Jemima can cry just as heartily over the griefs of an old charwoman—whose idle, drunken husband robs her weekly of her hardly-earned wages—and my cousin will pinch herself, too, to help the poor old victim.

Jemima, to my surprise, wrote to me from Bayeux. I cannot tell to this day how the stout, soft-hearted, irresolute dame ever got so far from home by herself; but there she was, and being there, she wanted me to keep her company.

In some ways I am like a mariner's compass; I may hesitate in a vibrating, quivering sort of way till I have determined what to do; but when once my mind is made up, like Talus, the squire of Sir Arthegal in the "Faerie Queene," I go straight to my point, and stick to it as the needle does to the pole.

The next day found me at Southampton, and the next at Havre; and then, with all the recollec-

tions of my journey to Normandy two years ago freshly aroused, I asked myself why I should not spend one day at St. Roque, and see the Hotel Ste. Barbe once more, and have a talk with Louison about "our Jean."

Since my return to England, I have more than once felt ashamed of my ignorance and want of observation during my first visit to the Norman land, and when learned ladies are discussing the world-famous Church of William the Conqueror, I think of the dear old story of "Eyes and no Eyes," and hold my peace.

I had been into the church of St. Etienne certainly. I had been there; and what remembrances had I brought away? A broad riband of light stretching from the clerestory windows to the pavement, and a very ragged devout Norman woman, whom I had noticed previously among a band of street-sweepers. "It is never too late to mend," said I, and as the Orne steamer had not started the morning I reached Havre, I went on direct to St. Roque.

When I drove up to the Hotel Ste. Barbe, it

seemed difficult to believe I had been so long away from it, all looked so homelike. There was the chef in his snowy costume, white all but his boots, pumping into the shining brass-pan.

There in the foreground was Monsieur Clopin, rubbing his hands and smiling, and in the distance I could make out against the darkness of the sheds beneath the gallery the bright orange of the feathered carrots, and the scarole dripping still on the stones below. I felt inclined to rub my eyes. "Have they all been asleep ever since I went away," I thought, "and have they only wakened up at the sound of my cab?"

Ah, but there was one want! I greeted Monsieur Clopin as he helped me to get out, and then by a sudden instinct I looked towards the staircase. Yes, there stood Louison, nodding and grinning like a broad substantial sunbeam. But I felt a want. There was no sweet little voice trilling out "La Boulangère." Involuntarily my eyes went travelling round the courtyard, and then up to the gallery which ran along its walls, and I sighed.

"Ah, ma'mselle has not then forgotten him—
notre Jean?"

I did not know that Louison had come up close
to me.

"You must show me my room," I said, and
then I turned to Monsieur Clopin, and inquired for
his wife and children. He thanked me with the
effusion that no man can reach who is not French.

"Madame is quite well," he added. "She and
all the little family are at Cabourg for a week
or so."

Somehow, it was a relief not to see Madame
and Idalie, though I was sorry to miss the rest.
However, I could not stay at St. Roque till they
came back; so I left my little gifts for them with
Louison, and presented her with that most valued
treasure to French servants, a pair of English
scissors.

The house seemed very sad. Everything re-
minded me so painfully of the bright little spirit
gone on before. I looked at my watch. Only two
o'clock, and I knew the table d'hôte was not till
five o'clock.

—“I shall get a brioche at Madame Triquet’s,” I said to myself, “and then I will go on to St. Etienne, and make a few notes.”

Looking back on what I have written, I see that I have likened myself to the iron squire of Britomart’s knight, and my readers will naturally infer that, having come to St. Roque with the idea of expiation, I shall stride on vigorously through the Rue Notre Dame, looking neither to the right nor to the left till I reach the cathedral. But, alas! if “it is never too late to mend,” there is another truth equally certain—“We none of us know what we can do till we try.”

A little way on I came to the tempting window, above which shone in large golden capitals the words, “VICTORINE TRIQUET V^{VE}, PATISSIER.” Nature stirred within me at the sight. I had only got a mouthful of roll and one cup of coffee at Havre before the boat started. I went in and asked for a brioche.

Madame Triquet was alone, as bland and gracious as ever. Her fair, handsome, Norman face was rounder and fuller, but she was little

changed. In the midst of an eloquent description of the beauty of the children of her daughter, Madame Leroux, she stopped and gave a sudden exclamation—

“Ciel! there is that good-for-nothing again! Go along with thee! We don’t keep bread here for such as thou.”

At the half-open door stood a woman with large hungry eyes bent on the tempting counter within. On this some twenty different kind of cakes, each more enticing-looking than the other, were ranged in tempting array—not piled in the tasteless confusion of an English pastrycook’s.

The poor creature’s eyes roved over these delicacies, but seemed to be searching for something else. Her face was very thin and sunburnt; the stocking-cap she wore, without any strings, showed deep hollows behind the cheek-bones, and a wasted, attenuated throat; a miserable washed-out cotton-neckerchief covered her shoulders; and below this came what had once been a black stuff gown—now many-coloured from constant exposure, and with many-hued patches besides; her feet were bare, but

she wore heavy black sabots. And yet I noticed, in the midst of this abject misery, that the woman's face was clean, and that the kerchief was arranged neatly and modestly.

Suddenly the roving eyes met mine, and I recognized the face; in a minute more I remembered all about it. This was my street-sweeper—my poor *dévôte* of St. Etienne of two years ago.

I paid hastily for my brioche, and went out of the shop; it would have been a mockery to offer those cream-tarts and nougats to the starving creature on the steps.

She crept humbly away when she saw me coming out. I beckoned her to follow me. There was a baker's shop a little further on, and I went in and bought one of those wonderful loaves, in the shape of a great ring, which seem made to carry on your arm. I gave it to my street-sweeper, and then I said, "*Suivez, moi,*" in my best French manner, and walked on in front.

"Now," I said to myself, "by the time I reach St. Etienne she will have told me her story. These French people dearly love to chatter about them-

selves, and I shall have quite a little romance for Jemima when I get to Bayeux."

After a little I looked behind me. I expected to see the loaf half gone at least, but she had only eaten a very moderate portion, and she was crying.

"Poor creature! how very distressing! and she hasn't got a pocket-handkerchief, of course. Jemima would give her hers directly, but then Jemima is so eccentric."

I found myself getting uncomfortably hot in the face. I am neither conventional nor priggish, but a single woman is expected to be decorous in her behaviour, because she has no one constantly at hand to keep her in order, which I take to be the chief use of a husband. How very ridiculous it must look—to be marching down the Rue Notre Dame in this majestic fashion, a beggar woman blubbering behind me with a loaf in her arms!

St. Etienne and all my sage determination about it went out of my memory. I turned into the first by-street I came to. It was a narrow unfrequented turning, and it led into a street as silent, though broader, parallel with the Rue Notre Dame.

"If I mean to ask any questions, here is the place," thought I; but my false shame had found me out even across the water, and I scarcely knew how to begin. I glanced back. The woman had left off crying, but she had left off eating, too; and it seemed to me she looked sadder than ever.

A sudden thought came to aid me. I turned round, and waited for her to come up.

"Where do you keep your broom—the broom you sweep with, I mean?"

"If madame will let me, I will show her."

The voice and the accent startled me, both were so refined for the abject creature who spoke. She led the way now, and I followed. Spite of her rags and her sabots, she moved well, and with a certain amount of grace.

We came at last to an old Norman church. I fancied I had seen all the churches of St. Roque, but this was new to me. It looked weather-stained and dilapidated, and the huge doors were worm-eaten and falling to decay. One of these stood half open. To my surprise, my guide entered through the gap, and looked over her shoulder for me to

follow. I went in. Above me was the groined roof, with its bold stone ribs; the capitals of the piers that supported the four arches of the tower were massively sculptured; and beyond, melting dimly into darkness, was the nave of the church. A church no longer. Hay and straw, fodder of all kinds, were piled high, reaching above the pillars of the nave; and in and about the tower where I stood were carts and trucks, fire-arms and faggots, in a sort of grotesque confusion. I felt stupefied with surprise, for, spite of the worm-eaten doors, the exterior had given no tokens of this desecration. But my companion roused me.

“Voici, madame!” she said, and pointed behind the door.

It might have been the ante-chamber to a witches’ Sabbath gathering. There stood stiffly in the angle formed by the half-open door at least fifty besoms.

“When do you use them?” I said, by way of answer.

“Every morning and evening, madame, unless it rains. It rains now,” she said.

I was not surprised to see heavy drops falling,

the heat had been so intense. I felt sure a storm was coming; but it was a relief to hear those heavy drops, instead of the thunder I had dreaded. I do not like English thunder, but I am used to that. I know nothing about French thunder, and I would rather not encounter it, until I am safe with Jemima Brown.

"Will not madame be seated?"

There was my sweeper, with true French courtesy, dusting a chair with her poor, many-coloured gown; and then I saw that several of these chairs were stacked together near the brooms, possibly for the convenience of the sweepers.

"You had better sit down, too."

She thanked me, but she shook her head, and kept standing at a respectful distance. I felt, spite of her rags and misery, quite ashamed of having given her that loaf—she was so gentle and well-mannered.

Well, here I was alone with the object of my curiosity, and, judging by the sound of the rain, I must remain a prisoner till it subsided; and yet I did not know how to frame a question to lead her

on to telling her story. I looked up at her; her eyes were fixed on me with a searching, inquiring gaze.

"I wonder if she wants to know *my* story," said I; and I felt, I suppose, as the knife-grinder did when he made that memorable answer. "Dear me," said I, peevishly, "I dare say she has not got a story after all."

Whatever her story might be, so much as this revealed itself in the woman's face—she was humbly ashamed of her estate; I read in her eyes, as I thought, that she had brought herself to it, and had repented. There was no trace of proud humility; and also, spite of the outward degradation, the inner light of the spirit shone yet in the large earnest eyes and thoughtful mouth.

"What is your name?"

I really did not mean to ask this question; but I fancy my tongue had got tired of the long silence, and just put me on one side. The woman was evidently startled out of a reverie—her lips quivered.

"I am called Thérésine, madame."

"But what other name have you?"

Poor creature! Looking at that tanned, weather-stained skin, I had got to fancy her quite hardened out of sentiment; but a deep flush rose up to her brown forehead.

She shook her head.

"I have no other name, madame. I have lost mine. It is dead now."

The tone was so sad, so uncomplaining, that I found my eyes full of tears before I knew it.

I could not sit here with this poor creature standing in front of me as if I were a judge and she a criminal. Let her have done what she would, she was better than I was. She had found me a shelter, shown courtesy, and then confessed herself a sinner to a fellow-mortal. I got up and went close to her.

"Thérésine, I am sure you are unhappy; what is your grief? Perhaps I can help you, if you will let me." My foolish tongue really was quite beyond my control. I was growing just as eccentric as Jemima Brown, and I expected to see the French-woman fling herself at my knees, and embrace them in an effusion of feeling.

‘Good gracious! what shall I do? I hate scenes, and I cannot get away because of the rain.’

Not a bit of a scene followed. My street-sweeper turned away from me, and looked steadfastly into the dimness behind her.

It seemed to me that she looked taller than I had fancied. I began to be afraid of her. I am apt to be afraid of women taller than myself. I heartily wished I had left Thérésine and her story alone.

I went to the door and looked out. One might have thought there was a leak in the great heavy clouds, in hue like a leaden cistern; for the rain came down in streams rather than in drops.

“Madame”—Thérésine had followed me—“you are an English lady. Is it not so?”

“Yes.”

I must tell this story as it happened, though some of it puts me to shame; but I really thought she was going to ask for money after this preface.

“Well, madame, I love your nation. In six years of shame and sorrow one other voice spoke kind words to me, and that was the voice of an

Englishman. I was proud then, I would not answer, and he went away. When you spoke just now, I thought, 'I have not long to live, why not bear up yet a little longer, and then hide all that is left of me away for ever?' But, madame, that thought was pride too. And what have I to do with pride?—unless, indeed, it is—and I think it is—the lowest of sins."

As the woman spoke I recognized the secret influence that had mastered me, and drawn me to her. Whatever she was, she had no ordinary mind, and that mind had been cultivated.

I did not quite know what to say, so I just took her hand and went back to the chairs. "Sit down, my good girl," I said; "you look very tired."

Poor Thérésine obeyed; but it seemed as if all her dignity and self-control left her as soon as I touched her hand. She sank down on the chair I gave her, and buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

She sat thus a long while; I did not like to speak. At last she looked up, her face wet with tears.

"Pardon, madame, but you can never know what it is to be treated like a woman, when for years you have only been treated like a dog. Once, madame, I was happy and good, at least I might have been if I had been content and obedient; but I was not either. I do not know how it is in your country, but with us the law for marriage is strict. One may not marry without consent of parents. If one does, one is a shame and a disgrace. Well, madame, even before I left the convent where I was learning, I loved. My mother was angry, she forbade me to continue my love. Madame, I was only sixteen, and I was obstinate. I could not bear to wait till the law would give me freedom. My lover urged me ardently. He had got an appointment in Paris, and I loved him. When he asked me, I went away with him—without consent from any one."

She stopped here so decidedly, that I was afraid she was not going on.

"But did not your mother consent when she knew you were married?" I asked.

A sad smile came over Thérésine's face, and she drew her chair further from me.

"Pardon, madame, I thought you had understood what I am. I have never had a husband. If I had, do you think the good God would have let me sink so low as this? He does not punish the pure and the impure alike. He punishes us according to our needs; and, madame, my need was to be humbled."

I sat still; but Thérésine was roused now, and eager to speak.

"Madame, I am not going to talk of the most shameful part of my life. It is not for you to hear. That was soon over. I had fallen because I loved; but when love forsook me, and I was left alone, I knew what I had done, and I fled away from worse evils I saw all round me. I begged my way back to St. Roque, but when I got here I dared not show my face. I used to hide near my mother's door. I have watched her in and out day after day. I was always wishing she would see me, but I could not get courage to speak to her. One

Sunday, it was winter, and it was dark when she came in from Benediction, I was watching on the opposite side of the street, I saw her foot slip as she went up the steps to her door, and she fell. Then I could not help it, I ran and helped her up. She knew me before I spoke; she pushed me from her roughly, and turned her head away. 'Go, I don't want you. You are disgraced,' she said. I cried, 'I am your own child Zizine,' but she would not look at me. The door opened and she ran in, and shut it in my face. Madame, I never saw my mother any more. Before next Sunday came she was dead."

Thérésine stopped here.

"But how did you live?" I asked, presently. "Did you get employment?"

"But no, madame," she shook her head, "the people of St. Roque say that their town is the cleanest and the purest in France. Perhaps it is, but it is also a town where they judge hardly. I had no character to offer. I had scarcely any clothes. At last I got a situation, and then the

worst happened—a man came into the shop where I stood, and he knew my face and told all about me.” Thérésine shrank into herself, as if she had been struck. “Madame, that was worst of all. My pride conquered—I could not bear it; I fled away and hid myself. Never again did I try to hold my head up among my fellows. I got field-work for a little, but I was too weak for it; and then a poor girl like myself told me the sweepers had a few sous each day for keeping clean the streets. I applied, and they took me on. One work is as good as another, and I shall sweep till I can no longer hold my broom.”

The glow that had come into her face faded. She looked as haggard and wretched as she had looked at Madame Triquet’s window.

“But will not the clergy do something for you? Is there no refuge where you could be taken in?”

Thérésine looked frightened. She held out her clasped hands towards me.

“Ah, madame, par pitié!” Then she recovered herself. “Yes, there is an Asyle near La Maladrerie;

but though I am a sinner, I have not led the life of the women at the Asyle. If I could get work more fit for a woman than this is, I would lay down my life to do it."

"But surely, if you were to speak to a priest, to one of the clergy of St. Etienne, they would not turn away—they would help you to employment. I have seen you in church."

"Yes, madame, I go to confession and to La Messe; but the priests do not know me from a hundred such as I. If I could get courage, I would speak to one of them; but it is too late——"

"No, it is never too late. You have been hardly dealt by."

I felt quite in a rage with the good town of St. Roque. It seemed to me as if I would restore my poor sweeper to respectability in spite of it and all its Pharisees.

I did not like to give Thérésine money, but I made up my mind to go home and talk to Louison and Monsieur Clopin, and see what could be done.

The rain had ceased some time ago as suddenly as it came on. I asked Thérésine if she could be at the old church next morning, and then I said good-bye.

II.

I TRIED to get speech of Louison and Monsieur Clopin, but I did not succeed. Louison had gone for a walk in the Cours Caffarelli, and Monsieur Clopin was never visible after he had carved for his guests. I fancy he went to his Cercle, for he affected politics and literature.

Next morning I came down to breakfast determined to do something for my poor sweeper. I met Louison in the gallery, and told my story. Louison put her massive black head on one side and looked at me.

"Hein—yes, it is sad—it is horribly sad! but what will you? Madame, there are at least fifty of these sweepers—all good-for-nothings—and madame will find that each one has a story to match this of Thérésine. I know nothing about it."

She shrugged her shoulders, and went bustling to the end of the gallery, from which her help,

Françoise, was holding a conversation with Désiré, the waiter, who stood in the court below.

"Chut!" very sharply from Louison, and Françoise disappeared.

I felt sorry and surprised. I could not have believed it. To think of Louison, so tender-hearted and pitiful to little Jean, so hard to this poor soul, Thérésine.

And Monsieur Clopin, whom I met in the entrance, was nearly as bad, although he veiled his indifference politely; but when I feebly and timidly suggested that he might get some employment from his numerous customers in the way of washing or needlework for my protégée, the man spoke out—he held up both hands.

"Madame, it is impossible, I assure you; it would injure my establishment if such a person were seen about it."

I went into the salle like a dog with its tail between its legs. I felt as if I had committed some heinous breach of propriety towards the Hôtel Ste. Barbe; and whatever was to become of my poor Thérésine! My coffee and my tartines had lost

their savour; I was thoroughly upset. What should I say to my sweeper when I met her at the ruined church? I felt punished for my Quixotic behaviour.

An arrival! Out bustled Monsieur Clopin, and on his heels went Désiré and Louison. I felt cross with the whole pack, and with myself, too, for being so helpless.

Surely I know that voice and that cheery fat laugh; I look up, a short stout woman, in brown holland and a broad-leaved brown hat, stands in the entrance of the salle.

"Jemima!" and instead of going forward, I stand stupefied with my mouth open.

How Jemima laughed! and then wiped her eyes and her face generally, and then laughed again; and as soon as I recovered myself sufficiently to join in the mirth, Louison and Désiré joined in the broadest of grins. Monsieur Clopin's moustache curved with delight.

"Oter café—oter pang et bur," said Jemima, pointing to my breakfast; and, considering her accent, I am inclined to think the gesture was

needful. "Well, my dear, you look wonder-struck; but it is quite simple. When I got your note, I remembered I wanted to see St. Roque myself, and so I thought it would be a great joke to take you by surprise. And really I am so tired of holding my tongue—they don't understand one word of English at Bayeux, and they are saucy enough to pretend they can't make out my French."

I coughed, and said this was a pity; but I was heartily glad to see Jemima, although, of course, I knew I should have to take care of her.

"You look worried," she said when we had had some more talk; so I told her my troubles about Thérésine.

Jemima listened with deep interest; but when I came to my appeal to Louison, she opened her round eyes in wonder at my ignorance.

"Don't you know," she said, "that a respectable well-to-do servant is more hard than any one in a case of this sort? Why don't you go to the Hôtel Dieu?" she added briskly.

"Hôtel Dieu! — what is that? where is it?" I said in a sort of maze; to think of Jemima, who

had never been in France before, talking to me of a place I knew nothing about.

"Oh, I've been reading up St. Roque," she said, with a shame-faced laugh; "I have got some curious old books on Normandy. Come along. Send for a voiture, and we will go there at once."

We went there, and I really felt thoroughly ashamed of myself that I should have stayed twice in St. Roque, and should have contented myself with just a casual glance at the Abbaye-aux-Dames, wholly ignorant of the community of good and holy women who live under its shelter.

We saw the Superior, and I told my story. She promised at once to give Thérésine needlework and to take an interest in her welfare.

"If she is what you believe her to be, madame—a true penitent," the good lady said, "we will soon make a home for her here."

I went on alone to the old church. I thought Thérésine would shrink from a fresh face, so I would not ask Jemima to go too. My street-sweeper was waiting for me. I think Thérésine had so given up hope and trust in this world that she

could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw me. I told her my news. Her lips quivered—she could not speak; but when I went on to tell her of some little plans Jemima and I had made so that she might present herself respectably at the convent, great tears came rolling over the poor sunken face.

“The good God will bless you, madame. If He hears the prayers of such as I, He must bless you.”

I got away as fast as I could—I hate to be seen crying—and then I went back to the shop where I had left Jemima getting an outfit for Thérésine. I had learned a lesson of humility that day—I, who have laid down the law to dear, short, stout true-hearted Jemima all my life.

If we live till next year we mean to go back to St. Roque, and see how Thérésine fares at the Hôtel Dieu.

THE BEGINNING OF MIMI'S LOVE

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The last time I went to St. Roque my room at the Hôtel St. Roque was occupied—occupied by a crazy-tempered Major, who, having spent his life in the East, had acquired the temper of a Bengal tiger.

The landlord, my old friend, Monsieur Clapin, blushed as he recounted to me the words that had been uttered between himself and the Major, when he ventured kindly to suggest that the Major should consent to yield up his room to a lady of means.

"Madame," Monsieur Clapin put his hand on his heart and bowed—"I respect you and your nation too much to repeat to you the words of this gentleman; but if Madame will take a seat in the room of Madame Clapin, who is unhappily absent,

THE BEGINNING OF MIMI'S LOVE.

I.

THE last time I went to St. Roque my room at the Hôtel Ste. Barbe was occupied—occupied by a crusty-tempered major, who, having spent his life in the service of the East India Company, appeared, from all I heard of him, to have left it with the temper of a Bengal tiger.

The landlord, my old friend, Monsieur Clopin, blushed as he recounted to me the scene that had been enacted between himself and the major, when he ventured kindly to suggest that the major would consent to yield up his room to a countrywoman.

“Madame”—Monsieur Clopin put his hand on his heart and bowed — “I respect you and your nation too much to repeat to you the words of this gentleman; but if madame will take a seat in the room of Madame Clopin, who is unhappily absent,

I will find madame a lodging as much like her own as possible."

It may be because he is the father of notre Jean, "my lost Jean," as I sometimes call him, but I do not think there are many kinder men than Monsieur Clopin; and he is so real—there is no profession about him, and he never forgets. I hold these to be two sterling qualities in a man, I, who consider men, from the timid, unmarried point of view, to be "deceivers ever."

But this story is going to be a very little one, so I must tell it straight out, and not turn into any by-paths of reflection on man and his failings.

Thanks to Monsieur Clopin, I am settled in a very pleasant room at Monsieur Hochard's, the bookseller, next door but one to the Hôtel Ste. Barbe, so that even I, who am by no means a strong-minded, "platform" sort of a woman, can go into the hotel for all my meals quite comfortably.

If I were a man I should like to be a bookseller. I think the smell of new books is delightful—and then to have so many passing through one's

hands would be a real pleasure; and as there is no private entrance at Monsieur Hochard's, I often linger on my way through his shop, and chat with him and look about me. He has no shopman; when he is absent, his daughter Mimi takes his place. I have not an idea whether Mimi is a pet name or a real French appellation. As I have said before, when I return to England I always find out many questions I ought to have asked and proper things which I ought to have done. I suppose it is from an intense sense of enjoyment, but I own that directly I step on French ground I seem to lose my head, at least, the reasoning part of it, and I give myself up to be delighted.

But whether Mimi be a pet name or not, Mimi is a veritable pet; she is only seventeen, and when she lifts her long dark lashes and looks at me so sweetly and shyly out of her dark eyes, I long to give her a kiss.

If Madame Hochard is present I check myself. Madame is a Parisian, she wears the simplest dresses, always black, either silk or alpaca, but they fit her charming easy figure as only French dresses

can fit. In the morning she wears a closely-bordered muslin cap, but of afternoons her shining dark hair is dressed without a straggling hair to be seen. I often meet Monsieur le Petit coming out of the book-shop, and I fancy he dresses madame's hair daily, for, as all the world knows, Monsieur le Petit is *the* hair-dresser of St. Roque.

I describe the outside of Madame Hochard because there is so little besides to say about her.

She is always polite—freezes me with a stereotyped smile as I pass her, and listens with an impassive face to any enormity I complain of in respect to Margot, the femme-de-chambre. I shall simply say of Margot that she is more fit to herd cows than to do housework.

Madame Hochard's cold grey eyes take in all my complaints, without emitting one ray of sympathy, and it does not appear to me that she rebukes Margot.

I rarely see madame in the shop; but the father and daughter are often there together. They are so much alike—brown, bright, genial creatures; unlike so far as regards mere beauty, for Mimi is very

pretty and well made; her father is small and thin and wrinkled, but very original looking.

One morning as I come through the shop I observe that Mimi looks sad. I fancy her eyes are red, as if tears had been suddenly brushed away from them.

"Come for a walk with me, my dear," I say in English. Mimi is learning English from her father, and talks a very pretty soft jargon.

"Ah, no, mademoiselle, I may not," then she blushes. "I thank you, but I wish to say I had better stay in the house."

The child (she is so childlike, that I often forget her age and treat her like a child) looks so confused, so unlike her simple, confiding self, that I waken up to the perception of a mystery.

It is startling! Life at the Hochards', even to my staid maiden mind, is monotonous. Everything seems to be done in a commonplace way, as it would be done anywhere else. There is a privet-hedge atmosphere, which I find oppressive, and this irregularity alarms me. How could such a mystery as a love-affair creep in here? for I am sure love

has something^l to do with it, Mimi blushes so intensely. I have heard that young French girls never fall in love. I feel my ears tingle with curiosity.

"It is such a fine day, Mimi, shall I ask your mother if you may come with me? I have to go back to my room."

"Ah, but no; and if mademoiselle will tell me, I will run to her room and fetch what she is going back for."

Mimi's eyes droop in confusion. She suspects my curiosity; I suppose my face has betrayed it.

"No, Mimi, you shall not go, and I shall not go either. I see I have only just time to do my shopping before dinner; but you are not well, my child, and a little air would have done you good."

"I am not well; no." Mimi gives a little sigh, a sigh with a quiver in it, as if it could easily be prolonged into a sobbing fit. "But to go out will not make me better." A real little sob this time; and somehow, without intending it, I find I have put my arm round the dear little girl and have drawn her sweet, sad face on to my shoulder.

I have no idea of extorting her confidence—my

curiosity has subsided into sympathy. Another sob comes, so deep-drawn that it makes my heart ache; but no words, till presently I bend down and kiss her fair, open forehead.

At this she breaks down completely.

"Mademoiselle," she whispers presently between her sobs, "I wish—I wish I could tell you my sorrow; but I may not. Maman"—she raises her head and looks round with such a scared expression that my heart is heavier still—"n'importe," she says gaily; "au revoir, ma bonne demoiselle."

She holds up her dear little face, and I kiss first one brown, rosy cheek, and then the other. While I am thinking how like they are to nectarines, she slips away and is gone.

Poor little darling!

Actually, as I walk steadily along towards the Rue St. Jean, I feel tears on my cheeks. Jemima Brown told me once I was sentimental. I begin to think I am.

I wipe away the tears and go on. Just before I reach the corner of my street, underneath one of those two old blocks of houses, which seem to be

nodding their overhanging gables at one another from opposite sides of the way, I meet, quite suddenly, as he comes quickly round the corner, a gentleman. He is shabbily dressed, but he looks so nice and good and refined, that I feel quite drawn to him, and in general I dislike young Frenchmen.

It seems to me that I saw in his face the reflection of the sadness I had seen in Mimi's eyes.

"Sentimental again!" I say rebukingly, and go on a little faster, ashamed of myself.

I have not quite turned the corner into the Place St. Pierre, when I hear hurried steps behind me. Here is my interesting unknown with his hat in his hand.

"Mille pardons, madame," he speaks in exquisite French, quite unlike the broad Norman patois of St. Roque, "but may I inquire if Monsieur Hochard is at home at this moment?"

But for the interest I feel, I should desire my stranger to go on and inquire for himself, his request appears to me extraordinary; but I am

quickly lifted above such a thought. A sudden revelation has come to me. I consider myself a witch. Mimi is in love, and this is her lover.

Now, if I were in England, and suddenly discovered that one of my maids, or any young girl under my charge, had a lover—a lover living near, who could prowl about and waylay the object of his affections whenever she went abroad—I should certainly wax irate and virtuous, and denounce lovers as “social blots;” but I suppose the air of France or my love for Mimi is demoralizing. I smile sympathizingly at my questioner.

“Monsieur Hochard is out, and I do not think he will be in till five o'clock; but you will find him up at the Castle, I fancy—he went there half-an-hour ago.”

He thanks me so enthusiastically, so gratefully, that I feel as if I had not done enough for him; and I see that, instead of pursuing his way down the street, he has gone off to the left, where the Castle is. I can never think of the Castle without a sigh. “Notre Jean” guided me there himself, and intro-

duced me to his friends the butterflies as they fluttered in brown and scarlet flocks in the grassed moat. Ah, notre Jean, you are as free as the butterflies are now, and as spotless!

covered that one of my maids, or any young girl under my charge, had a lover—a lover living near, who could growl about and waylay the object of his affections whenever she went abroad—I should certainly wax fume and virtuous, and denounce lovers as "social pests;" but I suppose the air of France or my love for Mimi is demoralizing. I smile sympathizingly at my questioner.

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II.

COMING downstairs on my way to breakfast next morning I see madame's door standing open, and I look in. Madame Hochard sits at her desk, frowning. She takes no notice of me.

I pass on. Madame's parlour is just behind the shop, and I feel sure of finding Mimi with her father. I stayed later than usual at the hotel last night, for I met some dear old friends there, and stayed to have coffee with them, and they brought me home so late, that there was no one in the shop as I passed through.

I open the door that leads from the passage into the shop, and mount up the three steps on which the floor is raised.

Monsieur Hochard is not there, nor Mimi, and Margot is standing on one leg half asleep, with her head stuffed into an empty bookshelf.

"Where is the master, Margot? and mademoiselle?"

"Ma foi! how should I know? It is of madame mademoiselle should ask her questions. I am here to mind the shop while madame settles her accounts."

I do not choose to question Margot, but I go away troubled. I cannot eat my breakfast, although the chef at the Hôtel Ste. Barbe—the old companion of "notre Jean"—surpasses himself in an omelette this morning.

The day passes on, and Monsieur Hochard does not appear. The shop is empty each time I go through it. I stamp about heavily, and linger; but no one comes, and the door of madame's parlour remains closed.

I leave the dinner-table early. I miss my friends and feel very lonely. There is no Mimi at my lodgings to welcome me in her sweet, loving fashion.

There is no one in the shop—at least, I see no one; but just as I am opening the door into the passage I hear a deep, smothered sigh.

I turn, remount the steps, and then I see Monsieur Hochard.

He is sitting behind his desk; his head rests on one of his poor thin hands.

"Good evening, monsieur"—I speak cheerfully—"I have been looking all day for you."

I stand quite still opposite him. I feel sure this will rouse him.

"Permit me to offer mademoiselle a chair." He comes out from his hiding-place and finds me one, and then I see the sorrow in his face. All the bright, cheerful intelligence which made it so remarkable among faces is gone. He looks languid and spiritless, as well as sorrow-stricken.

"You are ill, monsieur?" I say in sudden alarm. I have forgotten all about Mimi.

"No, no, no." He waves his hand and goes back into his corner behind the desk. "I am very sad, mademoiselle, and you will be sad too—my dear little daughter has gone away from us, and I do not know when she will come back."

"Gone! Mimi?"

I must have looked horror-struck, for the thought that flashes into my feminine brain is that Mimi

has made a runaway match with my interesting stranger, and that somehow I am guilty.

Monsieur mistakes my agitation for sympathy with his bereavement.

"Ah, but you are good, mademoiselle; you, who have known my child but some days, you love her, you grieve to lose her; ah, you have a so warm heart. Believe me," he stands up, and lays his hand emphatically on his desk, "it is a great gift to be able to love, mademoiselle."

His eyes light up, his face is impassioned in its earnestness—the poor meagre little face, so expressionless just now. I feel uncomfortable; a dim notion comes to me that Monsieur Hochard is giving me this praise at the expense of some one else.

"Where is Mimi gone?" I speak very quietly. I do not wish to discuss the warmth of my heart with the bookseller.

"Well, mademoiselle, she is for the present at Dives with an English lady. Mimi is to be as a daughter to this lady, and in return she teaches

the little children to speak French." He gives a deep sigh.

I get up abruptly. Is this all the mystery? Mimi has gone a few miles' distance to earn her living. I consider Monsieur Hochard very sentimental and foolish.

"Poor child! I have no doubt you miss her greatly; but you may depend upon it, she will like Dives. She can often come over to see you."

He shakes his head—he has felt the change in my voice. A faint tinge of colour comes into his face.

"It is better to tell you all, mademoiselle." He lowers his voice. "Our poor Mimi has also a warm heart, and there is some one who has seen her, and who has made me a proposal to marry her. He is good and loyal. He would perhaps make a good husband for Mimi; but she is too young, and he is not rich, and a poor marriage is terrible; and, besides, when I have refused this gentleman I thought I should keep my child."

"Why do you send her away?"

"Ah, mademoiselle, les femmes! Pardon me, you are also a woman; but it is true that women rule the house. Madame Hochard has discovered that Mimi knows of this attachment, and that she returns it, and madame says that these children will meet, and that Mimi will be talked about, and that she must at once be sent somewhere, from whence she will not feel herself at liberty to come to St. Roque; but, mademoiselle," he spoke simply but sorrowfully, "Mimi is not necessary to Madame Hochard as she is to me—she is *all* I have of happiness."

I know now that I was inquisitive, but at the moment I was carried away by feeling. I loved Mimi, and I was indifferent to Madame Hochard, and yet it vexed me to hear a husband imply that his child was more necessary to him than his wife was. I scarcely remember how I expressed it, but I let monsieur perceive my feeling.

"Ah!" he leans his head back against the shelves, and looks—oh, so intensely weary; "what

will you? if a man values warmth of feeling above everything and finds himself tied to a woman who has a heart like a stone, it is happy for him, I think, that he has a child to love—is it not?”

I hardly know how to answer.

There is a desperate energy in his voice.

I say “Yes” in confusion, and wish I could fly through the ceiling to my room overhead, but Monsieur Hochard is quiet again and eager to tell all his troubles.

“You see, mademoiselle, the poor youth was not satisfied with one refusal—he came to me again yesterday; but it was too late—everything had been planned, and in the evening I took my child to Dives. Ah, mademoiselle, it was hard to leave her. I had nearly turned back more than once. I could not sleep, and to-day I cannot eat. All sunshine has gone from my life.”

He covers his face with his hands. I feel miserable; I do not know what to say. It is a relief to hear madame's parlour-door open.

"Good evening, monsieur," and I meet madame's impassive face in the doorway, and feel that probably her "heart is like a stone."

III.

A WEEK goes by. I have not been able to get a word alone with Monsieur Hochard. If I were ten years younger I should think that madame was jealous. As soon as I open my door to come downstairs I hear a slight sound below, which warns me that she is on the alert.

She comes to her parlour-door smiling, and follows me through the shop talking with such charming affability, that it is impossible to interrupt her. When I am quit of her and find myself in the street, I wonder at my own cowardice. Why do I not ask monsieur how Mimi is in his wife's presence?

Something I can hardly define in monsieur's face, and in madame's, too, keeps me silent. I feel that any meddling will only increase the dis-union between this ill-matched pair.

I rouse one morning to a conviction that

madame is trying to get rid of me. Margot's forgetfulness and tiresome ways increase; and when I scold her—it is useless to complain to her mistress—she gives me a malicious scowl out of her colourless white-fringed eyes, as much as to say she enjoys my vexation.

But I am not going to move just to please Madame Hochard. I adopt a new plan of action. I avoid monsieur, and pass through the shop without even looking round to say good-morning.

We are in the middle of the second week when it comes into my head to go and look at the quaint old Cour de la Monnaie. My shortest way is through a very narrow passage between two of the oldest houses in the Rue Notre Dame.

The passage is so narrow that there is but just room to pass a person coming from the Cour, and I see Monsieur Hochard coming straight up to me.

His eyes are cast down; he looks utterly wretched.

“Bon jour, monsieur.”

The man's face lights up in an instant. To my surprise, he holds out his hand.

"Mademoiselle has not seen our old Cour," he says in an eager, confused way, and he walks back with me through the passage.

He points out the inscriptions on the walls of the old Cour, and then he says abruptly—

"I have had two letters from Mimi, mademoiselle; she is wretched."

He looks in my face as if he is sure of consolation. I suppose sympathy quickens invention—a bright idea comes to me at once.

"Monsieur, I have never seen Dives. Will you engage a voiture for me? I wish to go there to-morrow."

"There is a concert at St. Luc to-morrow or next day," says Monsieur Hochard, with such a happy smile on his face, "but I have a voiture at the service of mademoiselle, and if she likes to pay for a horse, why, I can drive him as well as another, and there will be little expense. Is mademoiselle content?"

"Excellent," I say. I could shake hands again with the poor little man in my delight, but a couple of stiff-looking Englishmen, in tall hats, are

in the Cour, and I fancy they would be easily shocked.

"Will six o'clock be too early?" says Monsieur Hochard; and when I agree to be ready at that time, he comes close and says softly, "There is no need to warn Margot. Mademoiselle will find a roll and some milk in the shop when she comes downstairs to-morrow morning."

And then he says good-bye, and leaves me alone with my countrymen in the Cour de la Monnaie.

IV.

I SHALL never forget that drive in the early morning. Monsieur Hochard's carriage was a small char-à-banc, with the benches set sideways, so that I could see stretching on alongside of our road the Orne, with its fringe of poplars; and behind, looming like phantoms above the grey morning mist on the poplar-bordered river, the twin spires of St. Etienne; and beyond again, at the further end of St. Roque, the capped tower of the Abbaye aux Dames, and between these ghostlike visions rigging and masts, betokening the harbour, also the flèche of St. Pierre, and other lesser spires.

The mist grows more and more beautiful as the sun tries to pierce it: it seems as if we were driving through a sea of opal. Presently the sun gets the best of it, and the mist clears; but when I turn to see the effect on the spires of St. Roque, they have vanished. The road has turned; we are further

from the straight course of the river, and are driving along a road that puts me in mind of Gloucestershire.

I ask a few questions about Mimi's lover, and I learn that his name is Georges Serret, and that he is clerk in a small banking house. After this we relapse into silence.

We pass high slated-roofed chateaux lying hidden among good-sized trees, and then we come to hedges with fruit orchards behind them, and crops of barley and wheat under the apple trees. Lastly, these disappear, the trees dwindling into stunted dwarfs as they near the sand-hills, which now take the place of all other landscape—a yellow, monotonous expanse—except that in five minutes more we see the sea shimmering in the broad morning sunshine.

My eyes soon ache with looking at it, and I close them, resolved not to open them till we are close beside it. Sooner than I expect our vehicle jolts over a pavement—or an attempt at one—and then we stop.

We have not reached the sea yet, and it no

longer blinds me to look, for the house we have stopped at stands in a garden, and a row of poplar-trees screens the glare. Only a white-washed, two-storied cottage, but it looks very pretty, with vines and fruit-trees clinging lovingly against the walls, and nasturtiums and china roses claiming a place wherever they can find it.

Monsieur Hochard fastens his horse to a hook on the gate-post, and then he leads the way to the house. We go into a little bare room, so filled with the fragrance wafted from the fruit and flowers outside, that the bees steal in after it through the open windows.

The door opens, and there is Mimi; but she does not bound in with a cry of delight. She is timid, almost shy, and she is so changed. Her eyes are heavy and her cheeks are pale. It seems to me that my pretty butterfly has become a sober moth. I kiss her, and then I stand looking out of the window, while the father and daughter greet one another. When I turn round they are both crying.

"You are nice people," I say; "I thought you would be rejoiced to see one another."

"It is not that." Mimi shakes her head. "But how can I let him go again, mademoiselle? we are both so unhappy when we part."

What can I say? I go out into the garden; but when Monsieur Hochard joins me there, he does not seem much more cheerful.

Mimi is not happy at Dives, and Madame Hochard will not permit her daughter to return to St. Roque.

We take the poor little girl for a walk, and I think she cheers up a little. But when the time of parting comes, I feel too cowardly to stop and witness it.

"I am going on a little way," I say cheerfully. "You will overtake me with the voiture, monsieur," and then I kiss Mimi at unawares, and hurry away.

When Monsieur Hochard overtakes me he is quite silent. After all, I am not sure that our expedition has done him any good.

V.

I GET a letter in a week's time, which recalls me to England. I go downstairs to tell Madame Hochard, but she is not in her room.

As I turn from the door monsieur comes bustling out of the shop. His face is so bright and full of joy.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he almost gasps with eagerness to get his words out, "I was seeking you. It is all right. Georges Serret has got a post in Paris, so now my darling can come home. Ah, mademoiselle, I cannot tell you how I feel; but you, I think, know."

I have put out my hand to congratulate him, and he stands holding it between both his. His eyes are full of tears.

"Well, monsieur, it is of course joyful for you, but I hope to hear next that Monsieur Georges is able to marry, and that you will give him your daughter."

Monsieur Hochard says "Yes," but not heartily. He cannot see that children are more necessary to parents than parents are to children. Poor man! he will have to learn the lesson; and I hope by the next time I go to St. Roque that he will have accepted it cheerfully.

THE CALVARY OF ST. SEBASTIAN.

THE

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Miss J. J. J. said "Yes," but not heartily. The money for the children are more necessary to her than to the parents are to children. Poor man, he will have to learn the lesson, and I hope by the time I go to St. Roque that he will have an idea in his mind.

THE

CALVARY OF ST. SEBASTIAN.

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I.

THERE is on the coast of Normandy the very charming fishing-village of Cabrin. There are many fishing-villages dotted along the coast between Honfleur and the mouth of the river Vire; but some of these have grown into fashion, and others are too squalid to be called charming. Cabrin is already beginning to lose some of its charm. Parisians have discovered that the bathing is even better here than at Trouville; and in the autumn months, instead of the pretty fisher-girls in their quaint striped petticoats, high-heeled dames, with parasols and many-coloured costumes, walk up and down the Plage, or sit under a pink-and-white awning, knitting and gossiping in the shade.

But much of Cabrin keeps its old charm—that

special charm of freshness which much contact with the outer world is sure to destroy both in persons and places. How strange it is that we take such pains to destroy all we value! In this age the old recipe of "a little wholesome neglect" seems forgotten.

Madame Robin's cottage may have been standing since the days of Duke William. It has two storeys, and a shingled roof which time and weather have warped and buffeted up and down, almost into the line of beauty; in its hollows it shows brilliant colour—yellow stonecrops and huge green house-leeks. Here and there vine-branches strain up to the eaves, and run in graceful sprays over the roof. Madame Robin has had some of these trained round the upper windows, for she does not allow so much as a leaf to display itself on the bare brown stems that make a map of the whitewashed walls below. Outdoor grapes are of no market value compared with the golden, downy-cheeked apricots, and the wealth of tawny, green, and crimson plums that lie basking there. It is not a mere straight wall, either: the parlour, with a bedroom atop, comes forward

boldly from the middle of the house, and so leaves a snug corner on each side. The fragrance of mignonette comes from these corners, and overpowers the orange star-like marigolds behind; the wall below the apricots is covered with jasmine, silver-like among the dark-green leaves. There is an entrance to the cottage on the left of this projecting bit—a doorway with osiers arched in front to form a porch. The grand leaves and tendrils of an immense gourd lie lazily over this—so lazily that it seems as if they are basking in the sunshine—while from under the leaves the turban-like fruit peeps out.

Madame Robin sits in a high-backed wicker chair just outside this porch. She never sits beneath the gourd when the turbans have grown any size, though her factotum, Sophie Migneaud, ridicules her, and says that even if a gourd did fall on her head her skull would prove the toughest of the two.

"Sophie is almost always right," says Madame Robin; "but I can't trust my head to an almost: she may be wrong for once; so I sit outside."

She sits outside now, her carpet shoes planted

firmly on the slate-coloured path, shredding lettuces into the wire basket on her knees. She is hot, for the sun shines full on her round, fat, red face, until he leaves his reflection there. Presently she leaves off shredding, pushes a cap string over each shoulder, and says, "Pouf!"

"Aha!" Such a shrill piping voice that, though she is used to it, fat Madame Robin gives a start that overturns the wire basket and scatters the green shreds around. "Did I not tell thee it would be too much in the sun to sit there, my friend? The salad and thou will be baked together. Allons donc! what art thou about?"

With the last words there comes suddenly round the corner of the cottage a tiny old woman, with a face like that of a brown monkey; the small black restless eyes and skinny claw-like hands are in a perpetual quiver of motion; a dark-brown gown fits her closely, and a brown gauze cap comes forward so as almost to touch the black velvet band across her wrinkled brown forehead. She points to the scattered lettuce-leaves and laughs.

Madame Robin looks uneasy.

"Pick up the salad, Sophie. Thou knowest that I sit here to wait for the child. She may come any minute."

Madame Migneaud puts her head on one side and smiles—at least the wrinkles round her mouth deepen, and her small black restless beads of eyes wink repeatedly. Her old friend and patroness is a perpetual amusement to Sophie Migneaud. "It is natural that she should this day try to appear dignified and wise," says her sarcastic companion, "when she is going to commit so great a folly. Why need she take Louise home to live with her? The girl was disinherited because of the disobedience of her parents. It is always a mistake to upset plans. My Emile would make a much better heir to Madame Robin than her granddaughter will; or, as I said a month ago, let Louise be at once promised to Emile, and then the affair is arranged."

All this to herself, as she picks up the salad with her nimble claws of hands. Her quick ears hear the wheels of the diligence before the sound

reaches Madame Robin. Sophie Migneaud has resolved not to say any more on her nephew's behalf. He shall speak for himself; but a great dread comes upon her, the dread that even now, in this short journey from St. Roque, Louise's pretty face may have gained her a lover—a lover, too, who may prove acceptable to Madame Robin as the husband of her granddaughter. The brown face twitches till it looks uglier than ever. She determines to make one more appeal.

“My friend”—she clutches at madame's ample black sleeve with her skinny fingers—“tell me, I may then present Emile to Louise as the husband thou hast chosen?”

She speaks just too late to get an answer. The grandmother hears the approach of the diligence, and scrambles to her feet; she is already waddling down to the gate, with the reddest and happiest face imaginable.

Next minute she has flung both arms round Louise. Madame Migneaud can just make out a flounced white skirt with black edgings, and a

straw hat lying on the grandmother's ample shoulder.

The grimace on Sophie Migneaud's face is not pleasant to look at.

"Bah! bah!" she says at last, and she looks smoother as she says it. "What a coward I am. Am I not a match for any one? Is it, then, likely that an imbecile old woman and a silly simpering school-girl can thwart my will? Ma foi! They shall pay for it if they try. Chattering old fool!"

This is her comment on the shower of tender petting names which Madame Robin lavishes on the young girl. Louise hugs her grandmother in return; but she gets free at last, and runs up to Madame Migneaud.

A tall sunburnt girl, with a saucy nose and a wide mouth, a few brown freckles on her clear skin, and bright laughing dark eyes, she comes laughing to the old woman, holding out both hands.

"Eh bien, Sophie—here I am again, come to torment thee; and this time I am not going away,

and I am too big to be whipped or locked up; so we must be friends, thou seest." She kisses the old wrinkled face on both cheeks, but there is no answering smile there.

II.

MADAME ROBIN had gone back to her garden-chair. "Sophie," she called out to the old woman, who has taken Louise to her bedroom, "I forgot. We must have an omelet and a cake for supper. Monsieur Vermont is coming."

The little black eyes looked fierce and glittering. "Tiens! Monsieur Vermont coming—and to supper! Ma foi, there has been already trouble enough in getting ready for Louise; and when I asked that Emile might come and see me, thou hast said it was not possible—thou must have Louise all to thyself. Hein!" Madame Migneaud came close up to her employer, and looked compellingly down in the unmeaning broad face.

Madame Robin felt a little frightened, but she had wits enough to know that Sophie's wrath could be turned aside by flattery.

"It is another thing," she laughed, "A staid

old bachelor like Monsieur Vermont will not come between me and my child; he will not so much as look at Louise; but with a fine tall youth like Emile it might be different." And then she once more struggled out of her chair and rolled into the house.

"Monsieur has certainly a grey beard, and he must be forty at the least; he is not a young girl's fancy," said Sophie, thoughtfully. "Well, if Louise were to marry him, she would not want her grandmother's money—it would be for me and my Emile. But then Emile has set his heart on Louise, and what the boy wants he shall have."

Louise was not in a mood to sit quietly beside her grandmother. She was so very full of happiness that the blood moved like quicksilver in her veins. She ran all over the house, praising everything; and then she explored every nook of the garden, counted the peaches and gourds and nectarines, and vowed they had never looked so promising; finally she darted like a sunbeam into the little dark kitchen, and startled Madame Migneaud among her stewpans.

"Chut! Thou must be more peaceful, child. We might as well have a gale of wind in the house."

At which Louise smiled, nodded, and then, snatching at both of the brown arms, she made the old woman's elbows meet behind her back, lightly kissed her forehead, and ran away to the parlour, screaming with laughter.

She threw her arms round her grandmother, kissed her on both cheeks over and over again, and at last sat down on a stool at her feet.

"Bonne maman"—she looked up in the old woman's face—"why dost thou have that grave solemn old landlord to supper the first day I come home? He is duller than our professor, more severe, not quite so ugly, perhaps—at least, he was not in the winter."

"Ugly! ma foi! Monsieur Vermont is a fine, good-looking man. He wrote to ask if he could speak to me on business to-night; but he is nothing to thee, my child."

Louise pouted a little.

"Sophie wanted me to ask Emile, but I would not."

Louise jumped up and hugged her grandmother. "Thou art an angel, *bonne maman*! I care not for Monsieur Vermont, but I detest Emile; he is so fat and stupid, and he has such round blue eyes and such shining red cheeks!—and I long to box his great ears when he stares at me."

"Chut! *mon ange*. Young girls must not talk in such a way when they have left school. Thou must like every one a little, my child."

"Only a little?" The girl's eyes sparkled with mischief. "Shall I love thee only a little then, *bonne maman*? And when I marry, shall I love my husband only a little too?"

"A little love that lasts is better in marriage than much which changes!" the old woman sighed. "But, my child, what dost thou know of love? No young girl should even think of love till she marries, and then her husband is her teacher."

"I know nothing of love, except that I love thee"—she kissed the old woman's hand; "but I

feel it, and I am sure I must love my husband before I marry him."

"Bah! bah! bah!" Madame Robin looked disturbed. "I don't know what the good sisters have been about to suffer such ideas to get into thy head."

"Bonne maman"—there was a sweet earnestness in the girl's face, more charming even than her mischief—"the ideas were there of themselves."

Monsieur Vermont came punctually at eight o'clock. Madame Migneaud declared herself tired to death, so Louise waited on the supper-table.

Monsieur Vermont looked at her and thanked her very courteously, but he talked entirely to Madame Robin.

When Louise went upstairs to her little bedroom, she was no longer joyful, or even happy.

It was a bare little room, the walls white-washed; there was not a bit of carpet on the deal floor; a bedstead, an armoire, which served as table, a wash-stand, and a chair, made all the furniture;

the only ornament was a black crucifix beside the bed. Outside the window, on the ledge, Madame Robin had placed two pots of scarlet geranium and some asters—"to keep the child bright," she said.

The girl looked round her. She sighed.

"I wonder if it is because the sunshine has gone"—she sighed again—"but it seems as if it would be more dull here than at the convent. As to Monsieur Vermont, he is a stone. He could not have taken less notice of me if I really had been the servant of grandmamma. If he comes here often, I shall be rude to him. I said saucy things on purpose, but he never even smiled. He makes me feel wicked. I am silly to think of him at all."

She began to brush her hair impatiently, but she could not shut Monsieur Vermont from her thoughts. He looked so clever, and yet he was so silent; he was so courteous, and yet so horribly, impassibly grave; and though he had not spoken to her, she fancied he had listened to all her nonsense with her grandmother.

"He is a provoking puzzle," she said. Her face brightened. "Well, there will be some amusement in trying to make him out."

III.

The room was full of light next morning when Louise opened her eyes. She had no time to indulge the lazy, pleasant, vague sensation of wondering where she was, for in an instant she was conscious that she had not awakened naturally; some one was knocking at the door—steady dull blows, repeated at regular intervals.

Louise was going to say "Come in," and then she remembered that neither Sophie nor her grandmother would have used this ceremony. She got up, wrapped a shawl round her, and said, "Who is it?"

"It is me, Emile Bibot," said a thick mounting voice, "and I have the honour to tell M^{lle} Louise that her grandmother is ill—but very ill indeed. My aunt cannot leave Madame Robin, and my aunt has told me to say that she requires the assistance of M^{lle} Louise. Will M^{lle} Louise

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allow me to express my sympathy in her sorrow, and my devoted wish to do for her all that lies in my power?"

Even through the door the sentence sounded absurd; it was said so like a lesson.

"Thank you; I will come directly. Please go away—that is all you can do just now."

"Oh, how detestable he is!" thought Louise. "Even without seeing him I feel inclined to laugh at him."

She dressed quickly, and she went to her grandmother's room. She had no experience of illness, and she went in as usual; but she stopped, frightened. Madame Robin lay very still and white; her eyes were closed.

Madame Migneaud stepped forward before the girl could speak, and led her outside the door.

"I do not want thee here," she said, "but downstairs. I have sent for the girl Constance, and she will do as she is bid; but I must stay here. It is possible"—she jerked her head towards the door—"she will not recover; it is paralysis."

Pale and scared, Louise went down into the parlour. There she found tall, blushing, awkward Emile.

"Ma'mselle, I am delighted to see you again. I assure you of my sympathy, of my devotion. Will not ma'mselle tell me what I can do to prove it?" He spoke as if his mouth was filled with gooseberries; he had already upset two chairs in bowing to Louise.

"Please go away, then; I want to be by myself," she said.

Emile got redder still, but he did not move.

"On the contrary, my duty is to stay with Ma'mselle Louise."

She turned away to the window; she was too sorrowful to argue. It seemed to her that she had never known till now how much she loved her grandmother. "And she may die without ever speaking to me again!"

Along the window-ledge was a fringe of fuchsias and nasturtiums; these last sent trailing yellow wreaths, backed by the exquisite grey-green of their leaves, on the wall below. But Louise did not see

them. She leaned her elbows on the fringed white window cushion, and hid her face in her hands.

Her parents had died when she was twelve years old, and she had been placed with the sisters of the Convent du Bon Sauveur, in St. Roque. She had been well and kindly treated, but she had always been longing for the special love she had lost in her parents. She was frank and loving, but she did not love easily.

She stood crying quietly, resting both arms on the cushioned window-ledge. But she was not lamenting her own fate as a desolate orphan; she was thinking, with bitter heart-ache, how cold a return she had made for her grandmother's lavish affection.

Madame Migneaud had told her nephew to make good use of his time with Louise; but Emile's love made him timid, and when he saw Louise crying his hair rose on his forehead with fright.

"Mon Dieu! She may faint!"—he grew pale, and rubbed his clammy hands together—"or she may have an attack of the nerves. What do I know, and how could I tell what to do with her?—and if

I did not do just the right thing she would think me an idiot. Ciel! It is insupportable."

He grew faint as Louise's sobs grew deeper; at last he could bear no more. He stooped cautiously, drew off his boots, and slipped out of the room. At the cottage-door, to his discomfiture, he met Monsieur Vermont.

"What is the matter? I hear the doctor has been sent for. Who is ill in the house?" His quiet voice brought back Emile's calmness, for it was very new to the self-complacent youth to be disturbed, as he had now been, by the idea of having to assist at a fainting-fit.

"Bon jour, monsieur," he said. "It is Madame Robin; but my aunt is with her: you need not fear."

Monsieur said "Thank you," and then stood aside to let Emile pass out; but the youth blocked up the doorway.

"I wish to speak to Mademoiselle Louise." Monsieur Vermont spoke as quietly as ever, but he moved forward.

"Oh, certainly!"—Emile's round colourless eyes

twinkled till they looked like his aunt's—"certainly; I shall have the pleasure of taking monsieur to see Mademoiselle Louise." He turned and led the way.

Monsieur Vermont was not so tall as Emile Bibot, but he was better built. He put his hand on the youth's shoulder and firmly pushed him aside.

"I need not trouble you," he said; "I want to see this young lady alone."

So many words came spluttering out of Emile's open mouth that the sound was like the gobble of a turkeycock; but Monsieur Vermont went straight to the parlour, opened the door, and closed it after him.

"I'll go and tell Aunt Sophie, I will!" spluttered Emile. "How dare he shut himself up alone with my future wife? Allons! I will make the aunt send him away."

Louise turned round from the window. She looked surprised when she saw her visitor.

"Bon jour, mademoiselle." Monsieur Vermont spoke in such a kind soothing voice that the girl's

tears began again. "I am much grieved at this sad news." He waited, but she did not speak.

"Can I be of use to you? I think your grandmother would wish you to consider me a friend, to consult me, and to ask me for all you want. I am the oldest acquaintance she has in Cabrin."

"You are very kind," Louise began in a formal way, and then stopped. "Oh, monsieur! all I want is to know if my grandmother will get well, and to be with her." She was clasping her hands now, and looking in his face with eyes full of entreaty.

"Have you ever nursed a sick person?" he said.

"No—oh no! I could not be of use to nurse, but I could see her, and she could see me."

Monsieur Vermont looked grave. It seemed to Louise that he spoke more quietly than ever.

"I will speak to Madame Migneaud." He went upstairs, but when he came again he looked sad as well as grave.

"Well?" she said impetuously.

"I am afraid you must be patient, and you must not go into your grandmother's room. I trust she is better. She is rousing now, and any sudden

excitement would be dangerous. I think she has a skilful nurse, and you may certainly trust our good doctor."

"But will she recover, monsieur?"

She bent her eyes so searchingly on his that he grew troubled.

"I hope so. She has had very good health till now, and that is in her favour."

He gave the girl as much comfort as he could, and then he went away.

IV.

A WEEK passed. Emile Bibot was always at his post, making himself more and more necessary to Louise; at least, this was the light in which he viewed his own attentions. He was persuaded that her ungraciousness was the result of extreme modesty. His old aunt confirmed him in this idea when she sometimes left the sick-room.

"Bah! bah!" she said; "thou oughtest to know by this time that when a woman says No she means Yes."

At this Emile went back with fresh heart to his wooing, but he began to be puzzled. He tried to believe his aunt, but it seemed to him that every time he approached Louise her face showed stronger dislike.

The days went by dull and leaden with Louise; she thought that the flowers had lost their scent, the fruit its downy glow and colour; perhaps her

eyes had grown dim with constant tears. These days would have been too wretched to live through without the visits of Monsieur Vermont. Louise had forgotten that she had called him "a stone."

He seemed to know by instinct when she was alone. He did not talk much; he only staid a little time; but she grew to long for his visits with a feverish expectation. "There is such comfort even in his smile!" she said. She was still forbidden to see her grandmother; but on the morning of the seventh day she at last met the doctor as he came downstairs.

"Ah, mademoiselle, I have good news." He spoke in answer to Louise's eyes; for the girl kept silence. "I shall not come again unless I am sent for, mademoiselle; my patient is really better."

"But may I go to her?"

Dr. Bernard hesitated. He was skilful, but he was very prejudiced against interference.

"Well, she is still but weak. If you had been there from the first it would have been different. I think you may be guided by Madame Migneaud."

Monsieur Vermont came that evening. He was rejoiced to hear the doctor's opinion.

"I am the more glad," he said, "because I am come to say good-bye. I have business which calls me to Paris, and I should have been uneasy to leave my old friend so ill."

"You are going?" said Louise. Her voice was hard and choked. She was keeping a sob out of it.

"Yes; unfortunately, I must go to-morrow. Will you come to the gate with me?"

He walked on slowly without speaking. It seemed to Louise as if her heart grew fuller every minute. "And he speaks so coldly! What has happened to change him? He cares no more for me than he did that first evening. But he has been so good!"

"Good-bye." They were at the gate now. He smiled and held out his hand.

The girl's heart gave a great leap. She pressed his hand between both hers.

"I don't know how to thank you"—she looked up sadly in his face—"you—you have been so good to me!"

His features suddenly stiffened. He drew his hand away. "Adieu, mademoiselle!" and then he passed quickly through the gate.

"What have I done? Why is he like this?" She blushed deeply. "I suppose he thinks me too forward."

She turned to go back into the cottage.

Madame Migneaud stood at the parlour-window. There was a grin on the sly old face; she looked more monkey-like than ever.

"So monsieur is off to his fair widow, is he? I wonder if he brings her back this time with him?"

Louise felt sick and giddy, as if a prop on which she was leaning had suddenly snapped.

"What do you mean, Sophie?"

"What I say. The business Monsieur Vermont has in Paris is to see a lady—Madame D'Albi—who is going to be his wife; that is all I mean. Now, if you will sit quite still, you may go to your grandmother."

Louise slunk away. She was cowed, full of shame and dismay; she felt like a thief. What had she been doing? Counting on Monsieur Vermont's

sympathy and friendship, when he could have no feeling for her but pity. Of course everything else belonged to Madame D'Albi. "And I held his hand in both mine!" said the girl, with a hot rush of shame to her forehead. "Oh, what can he think of me?"

She opened the door of her grandmother's bedroom and went in.

The pale still face lying there with closed eyelids calmed her.

V.

MONSIEUR VERMONT had been gone five days.

Sophie Migneaud affirmed that he would not return for a month, and Louise listened with a kind of sullen despair. She saw her grandmother every day now, but she was never left alone with her unless Madame Robin was sleeping. More than once Louise tried for mastery over Madame Migneaud, but she was too helpless to gain her point. She knew she could not manage the patient by herself, and so long as Sophie came into the room she would be mistress there.

On the night of this fifth day Louise had gone to bed more cheerfully. Emile had been absent all day. It was a relief to be freed from his silly talk and foolish staring eyes. During the last few days he had grown more constant and familiar in his attentions, and Louise had tried in vain to offend him.

"I believe if I even struck him he would persist in persecuting me with his odious compliments. Oh, how I do hate him!"

She sat at her window looking out over the garden. It lay flooded in moonlight, which shone like hoarfrost on the little grass-plot. Two dark lines fell across this brightness—the shadows of the poplars in the road beyond. It seemed to Louise as if her life had grown into a hard dark line; her grandmother an insensible invalid, and her only companion a man whom she disliked and despised.

She started and turned suddenly round; the room looked inky black after the light on which she had been gazing, but she was sensible of a soft creeping tread getting nearer and nearer.

"What is it?" she shrieked in her terror; and then she saw Sophie's grinning, ugly face close to her own.

"Chut! for shame! How canst thou be such a child? I have come to fetch thee, Louise; thy grandmother is dying, and she has asked for thee."

The ague-like terror which had seized the girl

returned; she caught at Sophie's arm as she followed her. Madame Migneaud went on silently to the sick-room.

Louise was startled to find this full of light. Madame Robin sat up in her bed, propped by pillows; her eyes were open, and there was a flush on her face. The *bonne* Constance stood at the end of the room, her round eyes full of wonder, and near Madame Robin was Emile Bibot. His back was towards the door, but Madame Migneaud led Louise up beside him.

The girl went on till she was close to her grandmother. She thought death would be different from this. She had never seen it, but she had pictured it as something terrible and awful. She bent down and kissed the old woman's flushed cheek.

"Who is it?" Madame Robin's voice sounded hoarse, and her words came indistinctly.

"It is Louise. Thou hast something to say to her, old friend."

Madame Migneaud pushed Louise aside, and bent closely over the sick woman. She said some words, which Louise could not hear; but she heard

her grandmother's answer, "Yes, yes—it shall be so;" and she saw the dull eyes fixed intently on her.

Hitherto all had seemed to the girl like a strange dream, in which she was taking a part against her will; but what came now was stranger still.

"Give her your hand," whispered the old Migneaud. And as Louise obeyed, she felt the sick woman's clammy fingers closing round hers, and then both hands were in the clasp of Emile Bibot. It seemed as if he extricated her hand from her grandmother's, and kept it fast in his. But those dull eyes never left hers; they fascinated and held her powerless. Again Madame Migneaud's head bent closely over the sick woman.

"Louise—promise," said the broken voice of the dying woman; and the eyes seemed to enforce the word.

"I promise." And then Emile's fingers pressed hers yet more tightly; and with a sharp sudden cry, Louise broke the spell that held her.

"No! no!" she called out loudly, in her terror. "I did not mean it; I promise nothing."

"You are too late." Emile pointed to Madame Robin. Her eyes were closed, and her face looked set. "You cannot break a promise made to a dying woman."

"She is not dying! She will live?" Louise flung herself forward; but Emile dragged her from the bed.

"Silence!"—Madame Migneaud's voice was solemn now—"she is dead!"

VI.

WHEN Louise awoke she found herself lying, dressed, outside her own bed. A coverlet and some shawls had been thrown over her. She could not remember how she came there. And as she lay, trying to recall the strange unreal scene she had acted in, it seemed to her that after Madame Migneaud's last words she must have lost her senses; she could not remember anything.

She was tired and unrefreshed. She bathed her aching eyes, and then she listened. "Surely it must be very early." The morning was dim and cloudy; she could not hear a sound in the house; and the *bonne* Constance always came at six o'clock, and stumped about in her *sabots* over the tiled kitchen floor.

The silence seemed strangely awful. There was not even a bird twittering under the eaves—only in the far-off distance the low booming of the waves on the seashore.

With a deadly sickness at her heart, it came to Louise that she was indeed alone for evermore—alone, too, in the power of Sophie Migneaud and of Emile; and with this came a distinct remembrance of her promise. A wild terror seized her.

“Oh, who can save me?” Her only friend was far away.

She stood thinking, or trying to think—for terror was growing too strong for thought to be connected. She must run away at once out of that dreadful house before she was a prisoner in it. It seemed to her just then that Madame Migneaud had power to make her do anything. How else had she spoken those words last night? She caught up her shawl; she was looking for her hat, when a slight sound roused her.

In fresh terror she drew the shawl over her head, and crept softly out of her room. There was, indeed, the silence of death in the house. A shuddering sob burst from Louise. Spite of her fear, it was very hard to forsake her grandmother. But she hurried on down the stairs out of the door—which was always left unbarred that Constance

might get in easily—at last she was through the gate. Which way now? The one road led into Cabrin, the other to St. Roque.

“The good sisters will shelter me,” she said; and she ran off towards the city as if Emile were pursuing her.

She was out of breath at last, and she paused to rest. She had left the cottage and all trace of Cabrin far behind. Before her stretched the road, like a shining yellow ribbon, with dusty banks on either side. Some way ahead on the right, the bank rose in height till it looked down on the road below—a steep knoll from which rose a towering crucifix.

“I shall feel safer beside that,” she said.

By the time Louise reached the Calvary she was quite exhausted. She knelt reverently towards the Calvary, and then a new thought came.

“Why do I go on to St. Roque?” she said. “The good sisters think much of a pilgrimage to St. Sebastian. The dear suffering Jesus will be more pitiful than even the good sisters!”

She clambered up the steep bank to the paved

ledge atop, and then mounted the flight of stone steps to the Calvary. The steps were worn and uneven with the tread of heavy-hearted souls, who brought their griefs to the Calvary of St. Sebastian.

VII.

WHILE she knelt Louise's heart grew hushed, as if a cool hand were laid on the burning, throbbing pain there. Her wild terror calmed. Why had she so despaired? Sophie and Emile could not make her marry against her will. She need only be firm and patient, and all would be well. She rose from her knees as she heard footsteps passing along the paved ledge. She looked quickly over her shoulder. Her shawl fell back. It was Monsieur Vermont, and he saw her.

Monsieur Vermont was beside her, holding her hand in his, his face full of eager question, and yet Louise was stricken with a sudden dumbness.

It seemed to the girl that Madame D'Albi stood between her and her friend. What interest could he feel in her now? Ah! what interest had he ever felt in her? But Monsieur Vermont's direct question roused her:

"Why are you here, at this early hour, my child?" He held her hand fast, though she tried to draw it away. The wild look in her eyes startled him.

"I—I came away—I am so unhappy——!" She hesitated. "Grandmamma died last night, and I must go back to the convent."

"Why should you go back?" He spoke sternly. It was the best means he could have taken to call back her scattered wits.

"I cannot——" She stopped, and blushed painfully.

"Tell me why not; or is it because of your engagement to Monsieur Bibot?"

"What do you say, monsieur? I am not engaged. I never was engaged." Louise drew her hand away in proud anger.

"But have you not promised?"

"Listen, monsieur, and tell me if this is a promise. I detest Emile, and he has always known that I detest him; but last night Sophie came and fetched me to my grandmother, who was dying. Oh, monsieur, I did not think it was so near.

Somehow my hand was put in Emile's hand, my grandmother spoke to me, and I said, 'I promise;' but next moment I denied it—and then she died—and I don't remember anything more. But it is not a promise. Oh, monsieur, tell me it is not!"

She looked up imploringly, but Monsieur Vermont's face had grown sterner yet, and Louise stood trembling before him.

At last she could not bear the suspense. "Do not tell me it is a promise, and that it is sin to break it," she said wildly. "I must be sinful, then, for I will never, never marry Emile Bibot."

She looked up full of fear, but Monsieur Vermont's face had changed—the sternness had left it. A bright smile shone over it.

"I believe this has been a trick," he said, "a wicked trick; and I think Madame Robin may be living still. Calm yourself, my Louise; you are not bound by such a promise as this. And Emile Bibot cannot have you, for I want you myself."

"You—but—*you* are promised;" and then she hid her face in her hands.

"I suppose Madame Migneaud told you so?"

But you have more trust in me than in Sophie Migneaud, my child?"

He drew her hands gently away from her face, and kissed her blushing forehead.

It was as Monsieur Vermont had suspected. When the doctor saw Madame Robin, he declared that she had been thrown into a deep sleep by an overdose of the opiates which Madame Migneaud had been intrusted with for exceptional use, and thus the little scene which had so terrified Louise had been contrived to work upon her feelings. Madame Migneaud and her nephew had to leave Cabrin in hot haste; for it began to be hinted that but for Monsieur Vermont's timely return Madame Robin might not, after all, have recovered.

She is alive and well now, but she has forsaken the little white-washed cottage, and lives with her grandchild in a large and pleasant château farther inland. She still sits out in the sunshine. She is very happy, and takes the salad under her special care; and she spoils Monsieur Vermont's and Louise's children to her heart's content.

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END OF VOL. I.

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